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Afghans caught in war's rising tide

Mark Sappenfield

KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN — Along Afghanistan's long southern frontier, the guns of spring have begun. For months, the Taliban has warned that when the highland snows melt, they will unleash their largest offensive since falling from power in 2001.

In recent weeks, the tempo of Taliban attacks has increased, hinting at the opening of the spring campaign. Last weekend alone, insurgents detonated a bomb in the western city of Herat and performed what US officials called a "complex ambush" near the eastern city of Jalalabad.

Tuesday, March 6, NATO responded in kind, launching Operation Achilles, its largest offensive ever in the country, at the Afghan government's request. With some 4,500 NATO troops and 1,000 Afghan soldiers, the operation is a bold attempt to preempt the Taliban's first blows and take the initiative.

It is also a clear escalation of the stakes, with both sides seeing this as a year that could determine the future of Afghanistan's Western-backed government. And it is here in the Afghan south that the hammer blow is expected to fall hardest.

Operation Achilles is focused on the southern province of Helmand, where NATO troops are attempting to clear Taliban from the area around the Kajaki Dam so that it can be upgraded and repaired. When fully operational, the dam can provide power for some 2 million Afghans in the south.

Moreover, Helmand has emerged as the Taliban's leading front in recent months. The Taliban claim that they control three rural districts in the province, including Musa Qala, which was the subject of a contro-

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versial peace deal between British forces and insurgents before the Taliban captured it on Feb. 1.

Tuesday, the Taliban in Helmand said that they captured an Italian journalist who confessed to spying for British forces, according to a Taliban spokesman. The Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* says it lost contact with reporter Daniele Mastrogiacomio Sunday.

In many respects, the developments in Helmand are an echo of what happened last year in neighboring Kandahar Province, which, as the home of leader Mullah Omar, has long been the Taliban's heartland. In the past few years, Kandahar has suffered 73 suicide bombings, by one local newspaper's count, and last summer, the Taliban pushed to within 10 miles of the city.

Now, on the eve of what could be a crucial spring, Afghanistan's second-largest city, less than 50 miles from the front lines, is in a state of suspension, uncertain whether to remain faithful to the government that initially promised so much or to resign itself to the return of the Taliban.

"If I shave my beard and take

off my turban, I will be killed by the Taliban. If I grow my beard, I will be killed by [NATO forces]," says Kandahar resident Dost Mohammed, standing on a street corner. "It is a place with two governments — we don't know who we should surrender to."

Like most Afghans both here and elsewhere, Mr. Mohammed speaks not from fear but from an oppressive fatigue born of the mounting sense that his country is once again descending into the cycle of revolution and civil war that has consumed it for a generation. Along with a lingering hope, there remains a deep fatalism that no matter what Afghans do, they will be swept into the whirlwind of war — ever the victims of forces beyond their control.

Caught in the middle

The events of recent weeks have helped strengthen this perception.

On one side, Afghans see the Taliban, which they almost universally consider a Pakistani-equipped army designed to destabilize Afghanistan and who spawn suicide bombers so despicable that they will target the opening of an

Afghan medical clinic, as was the case in Khost late last month.

On the other, Afghans see foreign forces who, according to common perception here, usurp the authority of local elders, happily let their male soldiers search Afghan women, and are inclined to shoot first and ask questions later.

In the space of 24 hours at the beginning of March, US forces bombed a family home in a village 50 miles

Western forces deny these characterizations. "We are here to protect the people of Afghanistan," says Lt. Col. Angela Billings, a spokeswoman for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), NATO's force in Afghanistan.

Operation Achilles is an example of this, ISAF officers say. "It signifies the beginning of a planned offensive to bring security to northern Helmand and set the conditions for meaningful development that will fundamentally improve the quality of life for Afghans in the area," Maj. Gen. Ton van Loon, commander of ISAF's southern forces, said in a statement.

Last year, similar military sweeps, such as Operation Medusa, had a significant effect. When the Taliban seized large swaths of territory and tried to hold onto them, the militants sustained heavy losses. But the Taliban's strategic advantage lies in their ability to sow confusion and draw Western forces into attacks that cause civilian deaths.

This year, the Taliban may be more inclined to harry and harass, experts say, stretching NATO as thin as possible by kindling dozens

Continued on page 3

Afghan National Police search people



News

Hugo Chavez' revolution and the politics of Jesus

Harry der Nederlanden

President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela let it be known that his political platform is inspired by Jesus. Although he is on good terms with Jesus, he is not always on good terms with the Roman Catholic Church. Recently he declared that one archbishop, Monsignor Roberto Luchert, who dared to criticize him, is headed for hell. (Of course, at the U.N. Chavez also declared that George Bush is in league with the devil.)

Although some members of the Catholic clergy are resisting his consolidation of power, Chavez told Venezuelans, the vast majority of whom are Catholic, that most priests support his so-called Bolivarian Revolution because, after all, Christianity is essentially socialist. The president often delivers long political sermons on the radio. Had he not become their political leader, he told his audience, he might have become a Catholic priest.

After his re-election in December of last year, Chavez persuaded the National Assembly to grant him wide powers to rule by decree for 18 months in order to carry out his revolution. There was little opposition to his proposal because the opposition boycotted the elections last year, so the Assembly is composed of his supporters. The constitution was also amended to abolish term limits and allow him to run for president indefinitely.

Although he assured everyone that private property and individual freedoms will be respected, he took action to nationalize electric and phone companies, and he threatened oil companies with nationalization if they didn't give the country a larger share of the profits.

He also announced that he would not renew the license of the largest opposition-run television station. This has served as a warning to other media tempted to criticize him too harshly.

In an effort to decrease the influence of American popular culture, he ordered radio stations to play 50 percent indigenous Venezuelan music, which is not very popular.

He has also invested \$42 million in Venezuela's movie industry so that it can compete with Hollywood. The government-sponsored films are supposed to feature themes of national identity and national history — and, of course, social revolution.

In February Chavez charged that supermarkets were charging far too much for food, especially meat products, and he threatened to nationalize them too if they did not mend their ways. Accused of hoarding food, the supermarkets charged that price controls imposed by the government were forcing them to sell at a loss.

The government seized goods from some private supermarkets and began selling them for lower prices at its own Mercal supermarkets, a chain created by Chavez. These supermarkets, however, say the critics, have only added to the problem. The Mercal chain sells basic goods and food items at 35 percent below the prices of the private chains, by subsidizing the prices. In addition, price controls have been imposed across the board on 29 food items, prompting people to sell on the black market rather than sustain losses. As a result, the shelves in many Mercal stores are bare. The government chain is also plagued by mismanagement and corruption: managers are accused of theft and of selling goods on the black market.

Government policies are blamed for triggering high inflation in the country. Consumer prices rose 18.5 percent in the last year, and reached 25 percent in January. The inflation, of course, hurts the poorest in society the most — the very people Chavez is trying to help.

According to a *New York Times* story, sugar prices set by the government were below the farmers' cost of production, causing production to drop. Productivity on the sugar cane plantations nationalized by the government also declined.

Where have we heard those stories before? Nevertheless, declared Chavez, "Capitalism is the road to the destruction of the world." He wants to institute a program by which private companies will give their employees paid time to be indoctrinated in the benefits of socialism — no doubt, a la Chavez.



Morales (L) and Chavez (R) in front of a portrait of Simon Bolivar

Bolivians look to Chavez rather than the U.S. for aid

Harry der Nederlanden

President Evo Morales of Bolivia has been trying to follow in the footsteps of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, but his policies have been polarizing the country. In January there were pitched battles in the capital city of Cochabamba between his supporters and opponents that left two dead and over 200 injured.

As in Venezuela, energy resources, particularly natural gas, have put a lot of spending money in the government purse. The additional government spending on social programs has made Morales very popular among the poor, but his policies have strained relations with other parts of the country. Morales has also been emboldened to try to expand his presidential powers like Chavez. His attempt to amend Bolivia's constitution, however, met strong resistance and he was forced to back down.

Since Morales came to power a little over one year ago, Chavez has worked hard to displace the U.S. as the main source of influence on the country by providing financial aid on many levels. According to a *New York Times* article, the Venezuelan ambassador to Bolivia is often seen at Morales' side wherever he goes. It quotes opposition senator Oscar Ortiz as saying that Bolivia has now become a client state of Venezuela.

Most Bolivians would prefer the influence of its richer Latin American neighbor over that of the U.S. and the International Monetary Fund, which they blame for most of their recent woes.

Chavez has also promised to provide Morales with military aid, which has critics both inside and outside the country worried. Will he use it to quash opposition within the country?

Ecuador's new president at loggerheads with congress

Harry der Nederlanden

The new president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, also calls himself a "Christian leftist" like Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. After his inaugural in January, he accepted the gift of a replica of the sword of Simon Bolivar from Chavez. Chavez named his revolution after the Latin American hero who fought for independence from Spain. Correa has also been railing against neoliberalism and capitalism, although not with the vitriolic anti-Americanism. And, again like Chavez, he is seeking to consolidate greater power in the presidency. He also seeks to champion the cause of the poor, doubling welfare payments to one million poor Ecuadoreans.

One of the largest U.S. bases in Latin America dedicated to fighting the drug trade in Latin America is located in Manta, Ecuador. Previous governments have been cooperating with the U.S. war against drug lords, but during his election campaign Correa said he would not renew the lease for the U.S. air base in Manta. It has served as the main base for surveillance aircraft.

A large share of Colombia's cocaine passes through Ecuador. Many Colombian drug smugglers have settled on the Ecuadoran side of the border. A recent raid uncovered a huge lab capable of processing four tons of Colombian cocaine per month.

Correa demanded that the country's congress authorize the rewriting of the constitution to limit

the power of traditional parties, which he says (perhaps correctly) are corrupt and self-serving. He has called for a referendum on the creation of a 130-member assembly that will have the power to dismiss legislators and judges. The assembly will, of course, consist mainly of Correa supporters.

A majority in the congress called the move unconstitutional and made a move to impeach the judges on the election court who authorized the referendum. The election court in turn dismissed the 57 lawmakers. The Correa government, of course, supported the judges, and when the lawmakers tried to take their seats in congress on Thursday March 8, their way was barred by policemen.

Without them, the 100-seat body lacks a quorum and congress will be unable to function.

Correa between Chavez and Morales



News

Afghans caught *continued*

of flash points across the country simultaneously.

"You're not going to see a mass attack – you're going to see a more spread-out offensive," says Ahmed Rashid, author of "Taliban." "They would like to see more crises in European capitals and countries being forced to pull out" of the ISAF alliance.

This has already happened in Italy, where questions of the country's commitment to Afghanistan almost toppled the prime minister recently.

But it also has a clear impact here, where some Afghans protested the deaths in Jalalabad not only with chants of "Death to America!" But also "Death to Karzai!"

Indeed, on the streets of Kandahar, some see the local Canadian ISAF contingent as a greater menace than the Taliban.

Among a clutch of rickshaw drivers assembled by a dusty curbside recently, one says that the Canadians shot his nephew; and another claims that they shot two of his cousins, who were only riding their bicycles.

It was not possible for *The Monitor* to verify or discredit these claims, but they are indicative of a prejudice among some sections of the population here. "As soon as we see troops on the road, we pull off," says driver Sardar Mohammad, whose weathered face crinkles in lines of grandfatherly concern. "We are afraid of them."

For these men, the concern about the Taliban is something different. No one wants to kneel to perceived Pakistani imperialism. But at least the Taliban are of their same Pash-tun stock. They do not fear every bearded face, and they understand the customs of Afghanistan – as well as the importance of Islam.

"There is a reason the fighting is not stopping in Afghanistan: [Foreign troops] don't know our culture," says Dost Mohammad, whose voice seems to be pleading as much as condemning. "They come with their boots into our mosques. This is why everyone is fighting against them."

Nearby, the corpulent figure of Neda Mohammad stands amid the crowd, his hands folded regally, his large frame cloaked in many folds of fine brown fabric. He is from the neighboring province of Oruzgan, but he says that he fled here because Western jets bombed his village. "If there is less persecution on us, then we would prefer

the Taliban," he says matter-of-factly.

'If I don't do it, who will?'

Alima, however, would not.

She ghosts through the muddy back-alleys of Kandahar, the fringes of her silvery-blue burqa fluttering behind. To some, her job of walking door-to-door to give children a free polio vaccination would be seen as humane. But even now, it is enough to get her killed here.

Not only is she a woman doing work – something forbidden in the most conservative interpretations of Islam – but zealous mullahs have also claimed that the immunization program is part of a covert campaign by foreign powers to sterilize Muslims.

If the Taliban were to come back, things would only get worse. "Of course I am scared of the work I am doing during the day – I have nightmares," she says, offering only her first name. "I am afraid that someone will come and shoot me in the head."

But she attempts to steady herself. She needs work to feed her family and buy them clothes, and she wants to serve her people. "If I don't do it, who will?"

To be sure, the potential return of the Taliban offers a far different prospect for the women of Kandahar than it does for the men. "See, I am working!" Says Zahra Suliemani, another volunteer in the vaccination campaign, whose bony hands sway beneath her back veil, gripping her medicine box tightly. "I can go out and work as much as

a man can work."

"No one wants the Taliban to come back," she says firmly.

But here, amid the ebb and flow of war, lives are already changing. Among the crumbling earthen houses and green spinach fields of her neighborhood, 9-year-old Nazeka chases her friends down dirt paths, shrieking with delight. But when she walks to school, her shoulders cautiously brush the walls by the side of the road. She tries to stay as far from the road – and the car bombs – as possible.

Sometimes, when she has to cross the road, she will ask a Canadian soldier to help her. Sometimes, she says, they do.

"I am afraid of the Taliban, because they are the ones making explosives," says Nazeka. "And I am afraid of the foreign soldiers because wherever they go, there are explosions."

At 9, Nazeka has already seen enough suffering. Unconsciously, she grasps a friend's hand as she explains, in an unwavering voice, how one night in the past "some people took my grandfather and tore him in pieces and then brought him back."

She does not know who did it or why they did it. Nor does she seem to care. "People should be so happy in this country," she says, smiling. "I do not like this war."

Along the city's main thoroughfare, however, those old enough to have



Kandahar rickshaw drivers Sardar Mohammad, left, and Lal Mohammad

seen many such wars merely shrug.

Abdul Bashir, for one, does not seem to be an overly worried sort of person. With a roguish grin, he somewhat curiously attributes his good business this month to the successful lettuce crop.

This from a man who sells used boom-boxes, stacked to the ceiling of his small stall. He polishes one, attempting to make it look present-

able amid the dust, while recounting 30 years of violence – from the "holy war" against the Soviets to four years of civil war to the rise and fall of the Taliban.

"The security situation is a concern," he says, the sparkle in his eyes undimmed. "But we're used to it."

Mark Sappenfield is a staff writer for *The Christian Science Monitor*.

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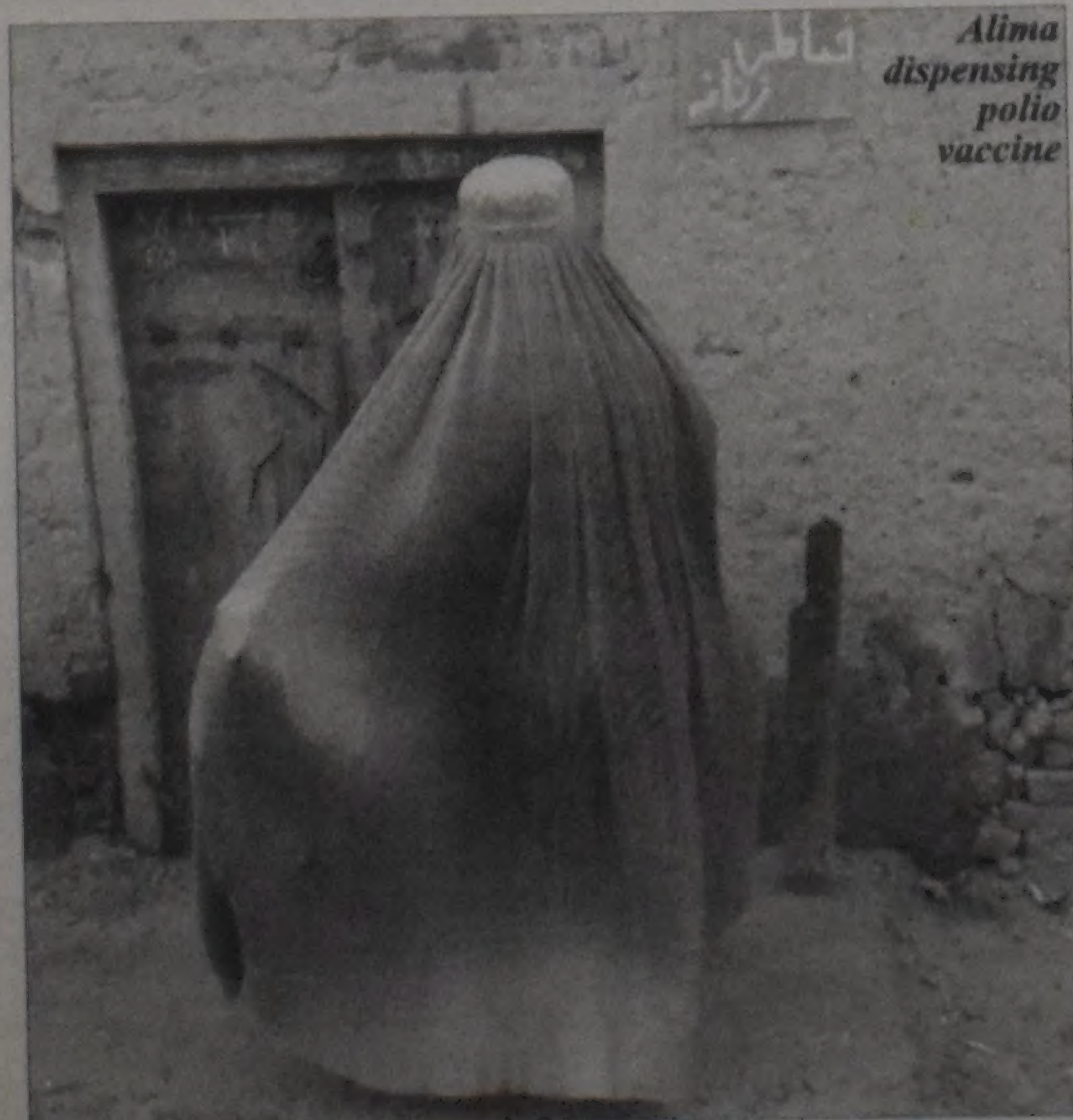
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Guest editorial

A Lenten Meditation on Psalm 88

(For John Koster and Family)

Calvin Seerveld

You can't read Psalm 88 at the drop of a hat. You need to get on your knees first.

My wife and I met Australian John and Helen Koster and family in Indonesia in 1987, when he was a missionary campus pastor at Satya Wacana University in Salatiga, where I gave a few lectures. Later they came to Canada, and John Koster joined as graduate fellow the Institute for Christian Studies. Since 1994 he has been pastor in the First Christian Reformed Church of Richmond, British Columbia. Because of immigrant adversities, crosscultural miseries, and family health matters too numerous to mention years ago, Psalm 88 became John's favorite psalm, because of its unrelenting, agonizing darkness. Since the lines of my life have fallen in rather pleasant places (Psalm 16:6), I wondered how to access 88.

Maybe nobody reading this has the calamities and deep faith requisite – so totally blocked, desolate, and feeling left alone facing life-failure bereft of any human solacing person – that he or she prays Psalm 88 regularly. But it may be worth the imaginative effort to stretch our experience of God and bring 88 into our faith vocabulary.

Christ quoted Psalm 22 on the cross, "My God, O my God! Why have You left me in the lurch?" because Christ knew, as I understand it, the last stanza of 22:22-31, which says God shall nevertheless come through. Psalm 88 is closer existentially to Gethsemane, sweating blood being at death's door with your closest disciples nearby faraway uncomprehending, snoring. Psalm 88 is close in tenor to Psalms 6, 38, 41, and like Psalms 95 and 129 does not have a happy ending; yet is deeply instructive, I believe, for the faithful.

PSALM 88: A song to sing. A melody by the guild of Korah, for the music director, to meet the needs of those fallen ill with constant worrying. A meditative poem by Heman the Ezrahite.

LORD God, my God who can save me,
I scream day and night in front of your face:
let my pleading reach you!
Bend your ear down to hear my babbling cries!

Yes, I've had it up to here deep down with an enormity of evil troubles.
My life seems to be going to hell.
Most people reckon me among those who have one foot in the grave.
I am like a strong fellow who is ... impotent!
like somebody left alone in a pile of corpses!
like mutilated bodies stuck in a big hole in the ground!
those whom You do not remember anymore! –
they are excluded from your [helping] hand.

You are putting me in that oh! so deep hole under the ground,
stuck in that gloomy, obscure God-forsaken region.
Your heavy anger knocks me around,
all the breaking waves of your anger buckle me over –

[Take a deep breath]

You have moved those who trusted me to shun me!
You have made me something detestable to those close to me.
I am hemmed in! I can't go out anywhere!
My eyesight is giving out from the miserable sorrow....

I cry out to you, LORD God, every [blasted] day!
I stretch out my empty hands to you.
Do You work wonders for those who are dead?
Do the shadowy leftovers of corpses get up to praise you?

[Take a deep breath]

Is your gracious covenantal love talked about in that hole in the ground?
Is your enduring faithfulness recounted in that place of final abandonment?
Are your great and marvelous deeds known first hand in that obscure, hidden, God-forsaken region?
Is your coming-through-with-just-doing really experienced in the land of forgetfulness?

Yet I, Lord God, I have kept on calling out to You.
Early every morning my pleading prayer is offered up to You.
Why! LORD God, why do you keep brushing me off?
Why do You keep hiding your face from me?
I've been miserable, I have, invalid-like since my younger days.
I have suffered through the most frightful things You have dished out.

I'm at my wits' end!

Your indignant angers have engulfed me.

Your dreadful acts are busy destroying me –

They surround me like flood waters day in and day out,
they close in on me all around!

You have moved whoever loves me and is a friend to me to shun me.

Obscure deep Darkness is my only intimate companion

Job's terrible troubles were a test case between God and the Satan, and tore his life to bits out of the blue. But the voice of Psalm 88 pitched by Heman the Ezrahite, a wise man probably from the tribe of Judah (Numbers 26:20, I Chronicles 2:6, I Kings 4:31), using the music of Korahite Levites, laments being sickly or handicapped from his youth on (v.15). The constricted, walled-in feelings and disruptive evils to his life have been of long standing, and the fellow has had enough catechism to think God's anger is somehow integral to his unending suffering and dead ends (vv.7, 16-17). The fact that the evil undergone is nowhere specified – childhood abuse, orphanhood, amputated limbs, sexual impotence, refugee displacement, neurotic sorrow, congenital depression – and just its constant, isolating hammering-you-into-the-ground is articulated – makes his pleas about the undiagnosed, implacable evil seem so enormous, hopeless. And You, God, have separated me from my loved ones, friends, any companion, is the fervent accusation (vv.8, 18). Why!?

The whole severe adult meditative poem of 88 is still couched in a simple childlike faith: You can save me, God, even if I can't quite reach You (vv.1-2) begins the complaint. Even at the end of my rope, I keep on crying out to You, LORD God (v.9b). Every morning anew (v.13) I offer up my plea, Abba (Daddy), for succour (cf. Romans 8:14-17): why treat me, your adopted child, my covenant LORD, like a pest (v.14)?!

And then this wonderful confessional argument (vv.10-12): dead men and women cannot praise You, O God! Destruction of your own people is not a testimony to your *chesed* (gracious covenantal love)! [Other psalmists confront God this way too – Psalm 6:4-5, Psalm 30:8-10 – and it is the same kind of struggle with God Moses used historically in Exodus 32.] Most people think I already have one foot in the grave: show them it's not true, LORD! Stop the everlasting waste of my life, and give me a breath of fresh air, for Christ's sake!–

We people of the Newer Testament last days (II Peter 3:1-10) can know that Jesus Christ on the cross became God's historic answer to the Darkness of Psalm 88, because Gethsemane Thursday was followed by Resurrection Sunday. But the resurrection faith must not serve as an "escapist," pie-in-the-sky side-stepping of the scalding cry of Ezrahite Heman). Psalm 88 itself, with Dachau/Auschwitz gravity (v-5), witnesses to the mystery of the LORD God, and gives a person the faith horizon to take a deep breath, to gird up your loins once more to wrestle tenaciously with the living hearing Almighty God, and be deeply united by desperate need with the Lord of Golgotha, even if you have to walk away with a limp (Genesis 32:22-32) or an undiagnosed thorn in the flesh (II Corinthians 12:1-10).

And if you believe the edited biblical Psalter is Holy Spirit led, as I do, the fact that 88 "concludes" book III of the Psalms with the other wise Ezrahite Psalm 89 that tackles the displaced expectation of King David's Messianic Rule, raising the personal concerns of 88

to the level of a communal historical peoplehood of God up for grabs, it is quietly assuring that the mix of Psalm 89 begins (89:1-2) by strongly affirming the very nature of the LORD God 88: 11 rhetorically claimed in brackets, as it were:

I will sing and make music forever about the covenantal mercy (chesed) of the LORD God!

With my mouth I will make known, O Lord,) your utter reliability to come through generation after generation...

Good prayer for me is to read a psalm out loud to god in the quiet of my study. Then speaking to the Holy One is simultaneously listening to

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History

A new take on the Renaissance



Elizabeth Lev

Every semester, during our Florence field trip, my students give oral presentations on various monuments in the city. After six years of hearing everything from "Donatello's 'David' is a homosexual icon" to "Michelangelo was anti-Catholic," I have learned to brace myself for whatever their "research" has unearthed.

But last month my students took me completely by surprise as they gave presentations connecting the reason of Renaissance architecture to the faith of Florentine society.

All the architecture presentations were on the works of Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-

1446), best known for his construction of the enormous dome of the cathedral of Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore. Although this project earned him everlasting fame, it didn't offer Brunelleschi the possibility to reveal all he had learned about proportion, measurement and space while studying the ancient ruins of Rome.

Brunelleschi designed and built several churches in Florence. While these buildings do not boast such

a dramatic dome, their carefully organized, proportionate and bright spaces presented a completely new style, especially when compared with the dark, vertical Gothic-style churches such as Santa Croce.

The first remarkable presentation took place right outside Santa Croce at the Pazzi Chapel built in the 1440s. The students filed out of the dimly lit church built with octagonal piers, pointed arches and wooden beams across the ceiling, and stood before a neatly defined structure with a columned porch.

The student explained how surprising this building must have looked to the Florentines,

so neat and measured amid the earlier forms of architecture. Pointing out the circle of the dome and the square of the building, he told the students that in architecture, the dome traditionally symbolized heaven, while the square represented earth, and that Brunelleschi, through his design and decoration, was trying to reconcile the two elements.

Watching a student explain the function of a church building and the connection between heaven and earth at the altar where Jesus, God and man, becomes truly present, was one of the brightest moments of my teaching career.

But there was more to come. The next students presented the churches of San Lorenzo and Santo Spirito, also by Brunelleschi. These students asked their peers to note the space around the churches and how these solid, proportionate buildings gave a sense of order among the winding and confusing streets that surrounded them.

They also brilliantly presented Brunelleschi's modular system of building. This technique, learned from the ancient Romans, takes a fixed measurement, such as the diameter of a column, and uses that length as the basis of the whole building. The aisle would be 10 column widths, for example, the nave 30, the height triple that number and so forth.

This system of perfect proportion lends harmony to a structure, and as the students pointed out, the emphasis on the concordant interaction of the space in the church, is meant to mirror the harmony of heaven and God's divine plan.

During the Renaissance, architects left behind the splashy gold mosaics and stained-glass windows which once dazzled the medieval world into sensing a transcendent space, and replaced it with mathematical organization, using the sciences to focus people on the

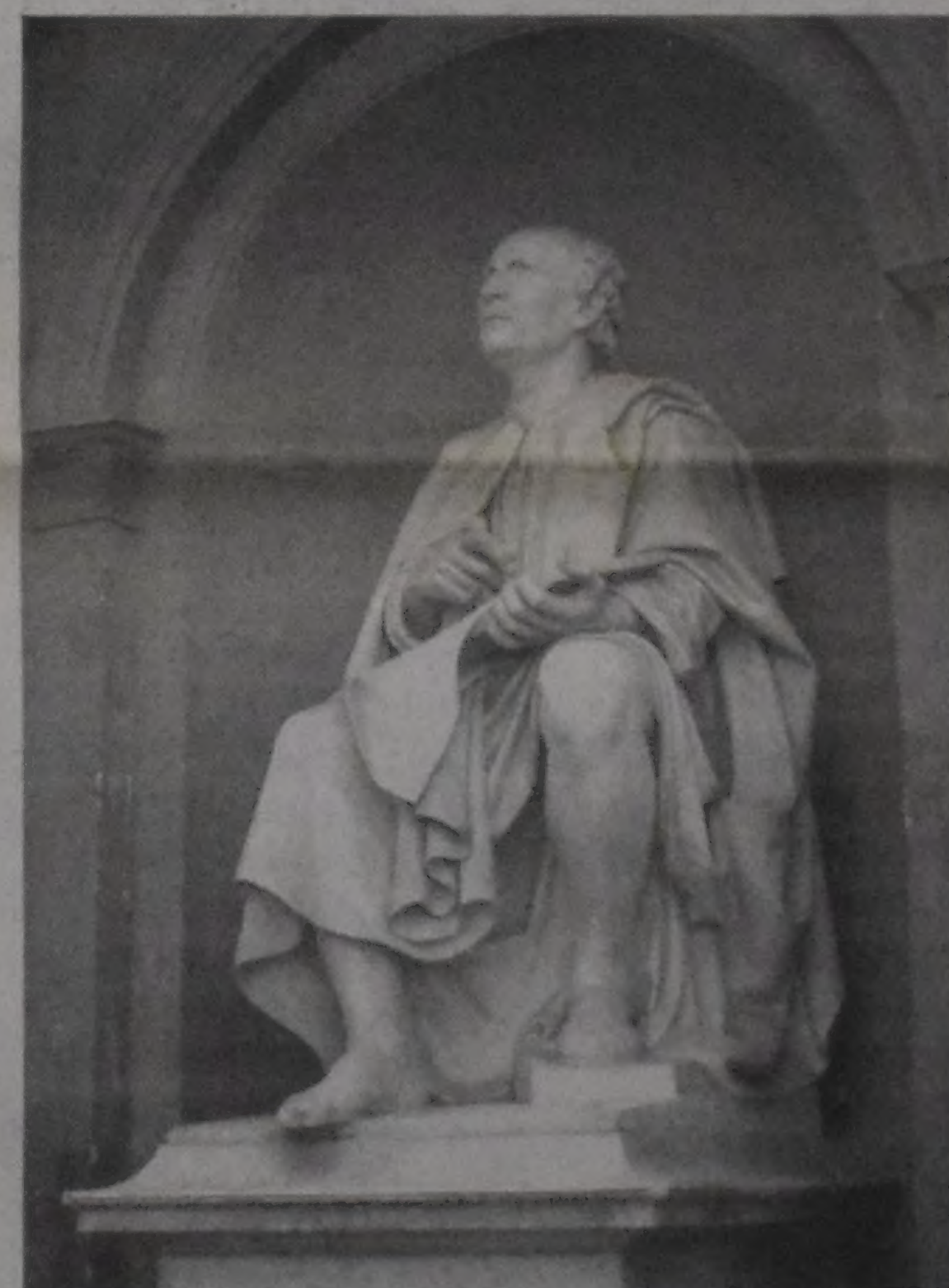
perfection of God.

For many years, I have heard students repeat the tired mantra that the Renaissance era, fascinated by the empirical study of nature, used science to liberate itself from religion, and that this emancipation is reflected in the art and architecture of the time.

But as these young people pointed out, the Renaissance used mathematics, geometry and architecture to enhance their understanding of God, seeing in the harmony of numbers God's essence as logos, or reason.

This remarkable era of faith and reason, understood and explained by young people from another country 500 years later, is an example the amazing universality of the Christian artistic tradition.

Elizabeth Lev teaches Christian art and architecture at Duquesne University's Italian campus. She can be reached at lizlev@zenit.org.

A Lenten Meditation on Psalm 88 *continued*

God's apriori answering voice, so to speak, and you can trust that at least the words spoken are not adulterated by self-serving petitions. And you know God is hearing you, if you have honestly lived into the holy Scriptures meant to be voiced, even chanted or sung!

The old church tradition of Lent (so much longer than Advent) is not particularly Reformational. But the discipline of post-resurrection Lenten weeks might be a good time to revamp one's devotional activity into a special period of intercessory prayer for neighbors far away and nearby, well known, poorly known, past, present and future, loved and not so loved. Lent would be an appropriate time for one to come to know God's psalm anthology well enough to pray particular psalms for the needs of those you focus on: those in pain or grieving, the unemployed you know, a couple of complacent Christians, desolate victims of violence, aggrandizing leaders in society, any staggering believers around, the homeless in the city, missionaries for Christ in dangerous Wahabi Muslim regions, to plea-bargain for inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah or debtor nation America, to intecede for your enemies....

We who believe Jesus is Lord of life and death need to come clean at heart on our knees, and robust enough in trusting our Lord to chime in with God's approved prayers, even #88. Then the constant angelic greeting is ours, as a benediction: "Do not be afraid, little flock: it is your (adopting) Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom Rule (Luke 12:22-32) Jesus Christ embodied during his passion on earth!

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Faith

Vintage faith in new wineskins

"Things are changing." It's a truism we hear often, usually accompanied by a dose of hype and the apocalyptic warning: "You don't want to be left behind, do you?" While I resent the manipulative nature of the remark, I do recognize that in science, business, agriculture, education and church, things change, and sometimes for good. They always have. They always will. The question is, how do you want to change? Do you want to be reactionary or accommodating, or my best hope, negotiate the change with imagination and integrity?

There is an amorphous, somewhat cheeky, mission-minded movement (or "conversation" as they prefer to put it) in the evangelical world called "the emerging church." They claim that culture has shifted dramatically with the end of Christendom and the advent of electronic media, and these "postmodern times" require a new way of being church. A new world demands a new church, and as one spokesperson Brian McLaren says, "We won't need a new religion per se, but a new framework for our theology. Not a new Spirit, but a new spirituality. Not a new Christ, but a new Christian. Not a new denomination, but a new kind of church in every denomination."

McLaren, like his colleagues, writes with a freshness and candor that is easy to swallow and digest. The mantra is: "It's not about a new model, but a new mindset." They want to shape an authentic faith that is amenable to the postmodern crowd, and distances itself from the goofy, rigid televangelist and the harsh legalistic conservative. They want to take the "vintage" gospel wine and its ancient spiritual practices and incarnate them in the new, more flexible and diversely colored wineskins of postmodern life. Often this means

in terms of worship, things like candles, couches, conversation, contemporary music and a strong, creative and caring community. As critic Andy Crouch puts it, and not without a load of ambivalence, they put the 'hip' back in discipleship.

What has Antioch to do with Jerusalem?

Sociologically, these "emerging churches" can be seen as a form of protest, protest against fundamentalist evangelical churches that claim exclusive, absolute certainty and see salvation chiefly as an individual's heavenly reward when they die, a reward given on the basis of the acceptance of a certain religious formula. They see this as destructive of the gospel and they are functioning as a revitalization movement for the church, perhaps not unlike the charismatic movement, the seeker-sensitive movement, or the Jesus People in their time.

Philosophically, they have a strong skeptical anti-institutional bias, not unlike the cynics of early Greece. Our concepts of God can become calcified, and take on a life of their own apart from God. Emerging leaders strive to question these conceptualizations and the empty ritual or routine religion that surrounds them. Peter Rollins of IKON ministries in Ireland says, "The cynics were deeply moral individuals who questioned the ethical conduct they saw around them precisely because they loved morality so much."

Theologically, they ground themselves in what Ray Anderson in his book *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* calls the "emerging theology" of Antioch in the New Testament. Jerusalem was the origin of the church, the community with the history, tradition, and privilege of proximity to the disciples and Christ. But Antioch, Antioch was the place where the Spirit moved Paul to mobilize a missional movement for the world. In Antioch, Gentiles were embraced in a fresh and radical way that was difficult for the "fortress mentality" of the old school in Jerusalem to accept. Jerusalem was confined by the weight of its religion, while Antioch could be open and be transformed by the call and power of the Holy Spirit for the next generation of believers. Anderson believes emerging churches are the Antioch church in a nation of Jerusalem churches.

Defined by what we are against

These emerging churches and their leaders have no shortage of critics. Some say they have made postmodernism the norm to which they conform rather than the gospel. The contention is that they define themselves more by what they are against, which happens to be more often than not a caricature of the rest of the church today. The theology they espouse is reactionary, sloppy, and functions (ironically) on a very modern

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



either/or binary opposition (eg. you see headings in the books like "from believing to behaving," "from teaching to facilitating," "from hero to human," "from propositional to narrative," etc, etc.)

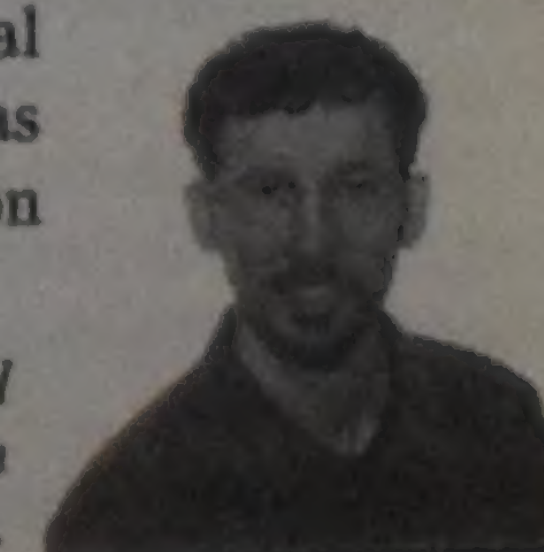
On a different note, emerging ideas are becoming their own industry, and they are "bought into" or consumed through the book market and on-line rather than flowing out of an ecclesiastical tradition and its networks. This fosters individualistic or congregationally-based theology and its fluctuating, fragmenting character. It is part of a pick-and-choose approach to life and theology.

Reformed folks can, however, see much in the emerging church that has long been a characteristic of their own tradition. One example is the focus on the kingdom of God rather than only individual salvation – broadening God's work to include social justice, ecological stewardship, and a renewing of arts and science. McLaren often mentions the covenant, too, emphasizing that the promise to Abraham was not only that he would be blessed, but that he and his people would be a blessing to all nations of the earth. Some churches tragically forget the second phrase in that covenant.

Emerging churches have a heightened awareness for God's common or preserving grace in broader culture as they seek to be an incarnational presence within it. They also eschew the dualistic secular/sacred split that shapes much of evangelicalism. As John Bolt of Calvin Seminary says in a recent review, "Brian McLaren and the emerging church movement need to be applauded for taking cultural context seriously and desiring passionately to communicate to our world today."

I read the emerging church literature because it's my job to scan the religious landscape. As I read, though, I am reminded of what we have claimed to be in our tradition for generations: "always Reforming." We have named ourselves as a perpetually emerging church for hundreds of years, although we have not experimented with new forms as boldly as we did in the past. At best, this movement can inspire us to free ourselves from exhausted religious forms and dream wildly about what our local church community might yet become as we negotiate change with imagination and integrity.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



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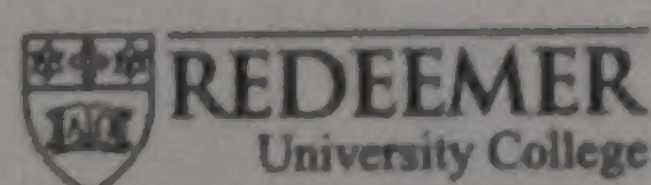
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Stewardship

The value of simply being there

Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer

My grandfather died of colon cancer when I was thirteen. It was a long and painful experience, with little joy or dignity at the end...and I was there to witness it all.

That's why when at age forty-three I began to have symptoms of possible colon cancer myself it was a particularly frightful time. To me, colon cancer was a death sentence. My colonoscopy was scheduled quickly, but I had two weeks to ruminate upon my situation before I knew my diagnosis. It was a time I never want to repeat, and yet one I also wouldn't trade away.

My two weeks of anxiety forced me to re-evaluate my life, what I'd accomplished, and what I had still left undone. It sharply prioritized the elements of my existence that were truly meaningful to me, and brought me a clarity and focus that I had begun to lose in recent years. It's funny how life really isn't so complicated after all – once you stand faced with losing it.

One of the most interesting revelations to come out of the experience however, was the comfort that can come from a simple connection with others – even complete strangers. As I perused internet medical sites late into the night, I was fascinated by the number of people who sought (and gave) comfort on internet forums. Like frightened voices in the night, multitudes of hurting people reach out into the darkness every day, not knowing who will respond...and people do respond. Time and again I read how grateful people were to the strangers who tried to help them.

Even I (something of a loner by nature), seemed to gain strength merely by sifting my way through the countless entries. I celebrated with the woman who said her medical tests showed her cancer was in remission. I laughed with the young woman who had just learned she was pregnant. I cried with the mom who reported her colonoscopy showed a late-stage cancer.

This faceless community of mankind gave me hope, strength and comfort. It made no sense to me, but it definitely did help me. When I received a diagnosis free of cancer, I knew I had to do something for those people still suffering – for all those who didn't come home from their tests with good news. That's when, quite by accident (if there really are any "accidents"), I came upon an interesting organization. In an online forum (unrelated to medical issues) a woman mentioned a group whose sole purpose is to provide words of comfort and support to strangers. I would never have thought it would work if I hadn't seen, and experienced it, myself during those two stressful weeks.

This unique group, formed in 2000 by Laura Armstrong, provides emotional support to those enduring chemotherapy. Volunteers are matched with patients all over the world, and send cards/letters and small gifts each week to the patient to help bolster their spirits and give them a few moments of anticipation and joy amidst the discomfort of treatment.

The idea for the group came when Armstrong met a woman on the internet who was battling cancer and began sending the woman cards and gifts to encourage her. When treatment was over, the woman referred to Armstrong as her "Chemo Angel" – and the idea for the group was formed. Now 4000 strong, ChemoAngels serves over 2000 patients in 12 countries. The mainstay of the organization is still chemotherapy patients, but the group also has a sister program that serves lonely seniors as well.

Whether volunteering for a group like ChemoAngels or just being supportive of a friend, the value of simply being there for someone should never be underestimated. A positive state of mind is invaluable in fighting any disease. Even a stranger whose face is never seen or voice heard, can make a significant difference in the recovery and life of a hurting individual. ChemoAngels can't cure cancer, but they can make the fight an easier one.

*For more information, go to www.Chemoangels.com

Fundraising – David

This is a second of a series of three on fundraising. Though you may not be a fundraiser, a fundraiser may have impacted you at one time or another so please read on.

Last issue, I focused on Moses and how he was instructed by God to only accept gifts for the Tabernacle from those "whose heart prompts him to give." I hope I was able to make the point that for Christian fundraisers the dollar target is not the primary goal (if at all) but rather fundraising is a ministry to cultivate a heartfelt desire to give. In order to facilitate wise stewardship in giving, donors need to understand how the cause fits into God's Kingdom work. Making the connection to God's agenda helps 'prompt' the hearts of those who have a desire to support the work.

In giving, a desire to give comes first. A good fundraiser will represent the work well and provide a meaningful case for donor involvement.

But giving is also learned and modeling encourages learning. It is one thing to talk about giving to a cause – as important as it is, but it is also important to go beyond the talk to visible acts of giving. That is where modeling or leadership fits in. In the Old Testament, King David exemplified willing leadership in giving as he initiated the first fundraising campaign for a new temple to replace the Tabernacle.

David had it in his heart to build a beautiful temple to God, but he was told through Nathan the prophet that God did not want him to build it. You can imagine how disappointed David must have felt. God, being sensitive to David, confided in him (again through Nathan the prophet), that he did not want David to build his temple because he was a man of war whose hands had been tainted by bloodshed. God promised David that his son Solomon would build the temple in a time of peace. Through Nathan, God also invited David to make preparations for the temple – the plans, the materials, and the fundraising campaign. In 1 Chronicles 28 you can read about David's plans – right down to instructions about the weight of gold for the articles of the temple service.

In 1 Chronicles 29, David is near the end of his life. His fighting days are over and there is peace. The respect of the people for David is probably at its highest. He has already handed the kingship over to his son Solomon and now he has called all his leaders, friends and family to an assembly in Jerusalem. He opens up his personal treasury of gold, silver, bronze, iron and precious and semi-precious stones – and the scripture lists tons of materials. David parades his gifts in front of all the people and then he gives this challenge to his leaders:

"Now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?" 1 Chron. 29:5b

People may have had doubts about the 'Temple building campaign', but now with David's generosity and willing giving those doubts are washed away. The response to David's example and challenge is dramatic. The leaders respond immediately and willingly give (observe how often "willingly" appears in this chapter). Now, Jerusalem is visibly drowning in gold, silver, bronze, iron and precious and semi-precious stones. People noticed. Consider the impact of this modeling on the ordinary people:

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

"The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly." 1 Chron. 29:9

They rejoiced and so did David! Ever wonder how heaven may have celebrated this spectacle? You can just imagine the celebration!

You get a sense of how David's spirit is moved in the prayer he offers (verses 10-13) and then scripture records this beautiful and instructive passage – to remind us of our role in the giving (no credit on our part):

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from You, and we have given You only what comes from Your hand." 1 Chron. 29:14, 15

Our leaders need to lead: they need to model the behavior that we are to follow. It is not about political advancement (David's earthly life is nearly over) or garnering a good image, but rather a focus on God and the purposes of his Kingdom. In Christian Fundraising it is important and helpful that leaders in our circles model giving – supporting new ventures that may present great challenges and skepticism about their coming to fruition. Many of our Christian schools and colleges would not have been started without leaders who modeled giving.

Lead giving helps overcome 'starting friction', something I remember from physics: it takes more energy to overcome starting friction than it does for rolling friction. It's still about hearts prompted to give but modeling encourages a prompted giver to go the next step: to decide to give. In the next issue we hope to address that.

Stewardly Tip: Being a model. David had nothing to gain politically or otherwise by his giving, but his example stimulated a watershed of giving. When it comes to those whom we have a privilege to lead or model: children, grandchildren, colleagues, associates – how can we model? Visible participation is the first step. Giving is not for show (see how much I give) though it may be visible (I believe in this cause and I support it). Consider how and whom you may influence and encourage. Letting the offering bag go by without giving says the opposite to a child who is watching.

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Fundraising 3 – Paul

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@cssservices.ca



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Church

Christian Churches Together is formally launched

Pasadena, Calif. — A consensus on the importance of evangelism and the need to eliminate domestic poverty marked the official formation of Christian Churches Together (CCT) meeting here February 6-9.

The CCT is composed of 36 churches and national organizations from virtually all U.S. Christian groups who have been seeking to come together for fellowship, worship and opportunities to share in important ministries.

"Remember that you belong to God and God does not belong to you," said the Rev. Dr. Larry Pickins, quoting his mother's early admonition. That, said Pickins, is the wisdom that will hold CCT groups together.

"CCT is good news for American Christians," said the very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky of the Orthodox Church in America. "Our gathering of the wider spectrum of U.S. Christian churches is succeeding in building mutual trust and overcoming stereotypes. Our common hope and expectation is that CCT will enable our churches to offer a strong and united Christian moral voice and vision in the public square."

Christian Churches Together (CCT) began in 2001 out of a deeply felt need to broaden and expand fellowship, unity, and

witness among the diverse expressions of Christian faith today. Over the past five years, with a focus on praying together and building relationships, CCT has become the broadest most inclusive fellowship of Christian churches and traditions in the USA, including Evangelical/Pentecostal, Orthodox, Catholic, historic Protestant and Racial/Ethnic churches among its participants.

A Celebration and Commitment Service highlighted the gathering that included over 150 participants and observers and a group of seminary students and young leaders. The 36 founding members includes the most recent groups to become official participants in CCT: the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America were warmly welcomed. Other groups are currently investigating membership, said the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson of the Reformed Church in America, chair of the CCT steering committee.

"Seeing the leaders of all the participating churches and organizations standing and praying together in their commitment to this vision was a powerful, visible sign of hope," Granberg-Michaelson said. "We have said from the beginning that our purpose is

to grow closer together in Christ in order to strengthen our Christian witness in the world. In Pasadena we all experienced how this is truly happening and this fills us with joy for the future."

Evangelism and the need to eliminate poverty in the U.S. were major topics at the meeting.

Dr. William Shaw of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., declared that poverty in the United States to be a "scandal."

Poverty "will not be redressed without intentional and painful effort by the total U.S. community," Shaw said. "CCT calls the country's conscience to that effort and commits itself to being a part of that redressing."

CCT participants continued discussions from the 2006 annual gathering in Atlanta on the topic of domestic poverty. A committee was appointed in Atlanta to find common ground and propose ways for CCT to challenge U.S. Christians and the whole country to address the tragedy of poverty in our own neighborhoods. CCT considered the committee's proposals and approved a statement on poverty while agreeing to continue addressing domestic poverty in the future, including a strong focus at the 2008 annual gathering in Washington, D.C.

Christian Churches Together's Statement on Poverty

As Christian leaders in the wealthiest society on earth, we are called by God to urge our churches and nation to strengthen and expand efforts to address the scandal of widespread poverty in the United States and around the world. The Gospel and our ethical principles place our service of the poor and vulnerable and our work for justice at the center of Christian life and witness.

Our common faith compels us. Christ our Lord teaches us that when we serve and stand with "the least of these," we serve and stand with him. Our Bible teaches us in hundreds of places that the God we worship has a special concern for the poor. God judges individuals and societies by how they respond to the needs of the poor. As leaders in Christian Churches Together, we believe that a renewed commitment to overcome poverty is central to the mission of the church and essential to our unity in Christ. Therefore in order to obey our God, respect the dignity of every person, and promote the common good of society, we must act. Our focus here is domestic poverty, but we reaffirm our commitment to overcome poverty all around the world.

Widespread and persistent poverty challenges us to action. The painful truth is that about thirty-seven million people in our country live below the poverty line. Tragically, 18 percent of all our children struggle in poverty. The sad reality is that millions in our nation work hard and still cannot escape poverty. We lament this ongoing poverty.

Our faith in Christ who is the truth compels us to confront the ignorance of and

indifference to the scandal of widespread, persistent poverty in this rich nation. We must call this situation by its real names: moral failure, unacceptable injustice. Our faith in Christ drives us to call our churches and our society to a more urgent, united response.

We are grateful for the vast array of ways our churches are already helping millions of struggling people. We want to build on these efforts, learn from each other, and collaborate more closely. But we can, we must, do more.

We also recognize and encourage leaders in community, economic and public life who seek justice for poor people in our land. But we can, we must, do more. Our goal must be the elimination of poverty in this land.

As we as Christians renew and strengthen our efforts to overcome domestic poverty, we will seek to work with people of other faiths and all persons of good will in this urgent task.

Unfortunately, partisan and ideological divisions too often promote one-sided solutions and prevent genuine progress. We believe substantial success in reducing domestic poverty requires an overall framework that insists that overcoming poverty requires both more personal responsibility and broader societal responsibility, both better choices by individuals and better policies and investments by government, both renewing wholesome families and strengthening economic incentives. We believe that genuine success in reducing American poverty will require greater commitment and concrete action by all four of the following: churches, neighborhoods, communities, and faith-based

and other organizations; government that implements better public policy at local, state, and federal levels; individuals and families; the market and private sector (employers, unions and other economic actors).

We are leaders of the Christian community, not an interest group. We have no partisan political agenda. We are conservatives and liberals, Independents, Republicans and Democrats. Together we believe that our faith demands and the people of this land yearn for concrete proposals that transcend divisive political divisions.

We give thanks to God for bringing together at one Christian table in Christian Churches Together for the first time in our history representatives of almost all the families in Christianity in the United States: Evangelicals/Pentecostals, Catholics, Racial/Ethnic, Orthodox and Historic Protestants. As a united voice of Christianity in this country, we pledge to strengthen our efforts to end the scandal of widespread poverty in the richest nation in history.

Four objectives

CCT will promote its commitment to overcoming domestic poverty by inviting all Christians and all people, especially our leaders in public life, to embrace and implement the following objectives:

a. to strengthen families and communities; because they are essential bulwarks against poverty;

b. to reduce child poverty; we seek to cut child poverty by 50 percent in the next ten years;

US traditional churches show decline in numbers, Pentecostals gain

Chris Herlinger

New York, (ENI) — Membership in traditional Protestant denominations continue to decline, while membership in Pentecostal churches and other non-Protestant bodies continue to increase, yearly data collected and released by the US National Council of Churches shows.

The NCC's Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches for 2007 — data collected by US churches in 2005 and then reported to the NCC in 2006 — shows that only three US traditional Protestant churches now rank among the 10 largest churches in the United States, the NCC said in a March 5 announcement.

These are: the United Methodist Church, ranked third; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ranked seventh; and the US Presbyterian Church, ranked ninth. All showed declines in membership in the annual figures, as did the highly visible Episcopal (Anglican) Church, which now is ranked 15th.

By contrast, a number of denominations — including Pentecostal churches such as the Assemblies of God and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — showed increases, as did the Roman Catholic Church. While the United States is a predominately Protestant nation, the Catholic Church remains the largest single denomination in the United States.

A list of the 10 largest US churches, according to yearbook statistics provided to the NCC by the denominations themselves:

1. The Catholic Church (69 135 254 members, an increase of 1.94 percent).
2. The Southern Baptist Convention (16 270 315 members, an increase of 0.02 percent).
3. The United Methodist Church (8 075 010 members, a decrease of 1.36 percent).
4. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (5 690 672 members, an increase of 1.63 percent).
5. The Church of God in Christ (5 499 875 members, no increase or decrease).
6. National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (5 million members, no increase or decrease).
7. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (4 850 776 members, a decrease of 1.62 percent).
8. National Baptist Convention of America (3.5 million, no increase or decrease).
9. Presbyterian Church (USA) (3 098 842 members, a decrease of 2.84 percent).
10. Assemblies of God (2 830 861 members, an increase of 1.86 percent).

c. to make work work; by combating racism and guaranteeing that full time work offers a realistic escape from poverty and access to good health care;

d. to strengthen the educational system in our country with particular attention to the public schools; because access to quality education offers perhaps the best way out of poverty.

For up-to-date information, see www.christianchurchestogether.org

Church

Latin Americans tell US churches of Washington's impact

Peter Kenny

Buenos Aires (ENI) – Participants at the once every six years meeting of the Latin American Council of Churches have asked US church representatives if they are aware of what their country is doing in the world and how it impacts on their region.

The 5th assembly of the council, which is known by the acronym of CLAI, and is the largest grouping of mainly Protestant churches in Latin America, was opened on February 19 by its president Bishop Julio Cesar Holguin.

The discussion was moderated by the US-based Church World Service, a cooperative group of 35 mainly Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican development and aid agencies.

"Are the US churches aware of how the United States is functioning and what it is doing in the world, and how then are they facing this reality?" asked one of the 550 participants who are taking part in the churches' assembly.

A participant from the United States noted that the traditional Protestant churches in North America, faced with dwindling membership and also funding, have been paying less attention to Latin America. This has been exacerbated by some internal tensions within churches on social issues, and divisions among Christians that surfaced during the Iraq War.

Another speaker said that if the US churches were to "accompany" Latin American people in a meaningful way, North Americans should "learn from the past" and speak out against what he described as an "empire" that was "destroying life" and "trampling on justice".

Churches needed to strive for justice, by living with less and combating an individualist and consumerist ethic, said one speaker.

The theme of the conference, which ended on February 25, is: "The grace of God justifies us, the spirit of God frees us for life."

Some participants told Ecumenical News International the statement seemed aimed at deflecting criticism voiced during the assembly that the council, known by its Spanish language acronym CLAI, had

been forsaking attention to social and human rights issues in a bid to woo more Pentecostal and Evangelical churches into its fold. The packed opening service was for the first time held in a Pentecostal church, one of the many that are experiencing rapid growth in Latin America compared to Roman Catholic and traditional Protestant churches.

There was also criticism from some participants about there not being a strong enough leadership voice in CLAI for indigenous people, women and young people.

The final document said, however, "We affirm the new horizons of the assembly in receiving greater participation in the decision-making processes of the council from the youth, indigenous peoples, and women, maintaining the validity of their respective programs without renouncing their wide-ranging importance to the rest of CLAI's work."

CLAI, a 150 member church council represented in 20 countries, warned of "the risk that faces churches in accommodating themselves to systems that are opposed to the values of a Theology of the Kingdom of God."

"It is therefore urgent to continue exercising our prophetic voice in denouncing injustices, violations of human, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, thus announcing a liberating theology that practices a communal, educational, and transforming ethic," said the church leaders in their final statement.

"We need to deepen our commitment in affirming full and abundant life in matters such as the annulment of the illegitimate and odious external debt of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean ... and of the rights of native peoples, African descendants, women, children, youth and people with disabilities."

For the first time CLAI elected a descendant of black African origin, Anglican Bishop Julio Murray of Panama, as its president during the assembly.

The church grouping said it needed to continue awakening "responsible awareness to stop . Growing environmental contamination, global warming, and the tendency towards privatisation of natural resources."

Hungarian church official warns on seeking collaborators

Jonathan Luxmoore

Warsaw (ENI) – A leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary has accused the Socialist-led government of attempting to "conceal urgent social problems" by encouraging allegations of communist secret police collaboration against local churches.

"Everyone older than 40 who lived through the communist system knows their very neighbors were often forced to report on them – it wasn't just an issue for the Catholic Church," said Laszlo Nemeth, secretary-general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference. "It's interesting that lists of ex-collaborators appear whenever important social issues emerge, and are then talked about much more especially in left-of-centre newspapers."

The priest commented after fresh public discussion of secret police collaboration by clergy following the January resignation of a Polish archbishop, Stanislaw Wielgus, following allegations of collaboration with his country's communist-era secret police.

Nemeth told Ecumenical News International the role of agents and informers had been debated at length by Hungary's Catholic bishops. The bishops had dissolved a communist-backed peace movement for pro-regime priests in 1991 and later set up a foundation to research

the cases of clergy who collaborated, as well as those who suffered for resisting communist rule.

However, he said, the country's secret police archives had not been opened to researchers, while Catholics, Protestants and Jews been unfairly singled out on an issue affecting the whole of society.

"Our bishops would like to see government legislation on the use and interpretation of communist regime archives – but our MPs [members of parliament] are still not ready to pass a law which would allow objective research in this complex area," Nemeth said. "Some material was certainly fabricated or later destroyed, while some people were forced to collaborate. If we can't establish the truth from these files and documents, how can we properly vet and screen our clergy?"

Catholic bishops in Hungary in 2006 requested forgiveness after a list of clergy agents was published on the Internet. This included the church's former primate, Cardinal Laszlo Paskai, who retired in 2002 and was said by the *Elet es Irodalom* newspaper to have acted as an informer codenamed "Tanar," rising to the rank of "secret agent" in 1973.

Nemeth, however, said no one could be sure "whether such lists are true or not".

Evangelical growth changes dynamics of Canadian Christianity

Kristine Greenaway

Toronto (ENI) – The increasing political influence of evangelical Christians is changing the face of the movement for Christian unity in Canada. More than half the members of the Canadian legislature belonging to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative Party are evangelical Christians, according to an article published in a recent edition of *Walrus* magazine, a Toronto-based world affairs magazine.

"They are becoming the mainline and we are becoming the sideline," says Lois Wilson, a retired Canadian senator and a former president of the World Council of Churches, now serving as the Ecumenist-in-Residence at the Toronto School of Theology.

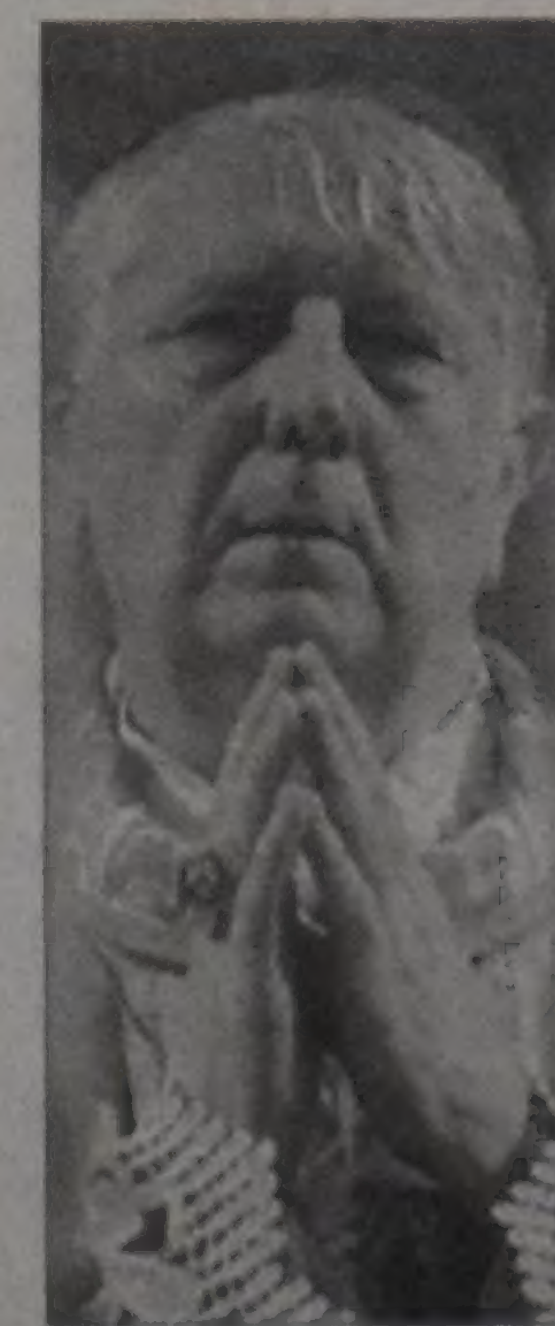
The term evangelical is commonly used in Canada to identify people who describe themselves as converted Christians. They are often seen as believing that social change comes through individual redemption rather than through faith-based movements, such as those sometimes associated with the WCC. As a result, evangelical Christians and those in traditional denominations are often thought to be in separate, if not opposing camps.

Still, recent years have seen increasing collaboration between the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, a network of evangelical organizations and churches. Bruce Clemenger, the president of the Evangelical fellowship, says the two groupings have cooperated in support for poverty reduction campaigns and have made a joint intervention on bio-ethics to Canada's Supreme Court. Such collaboration, he says, is due to "a focus on what Christians share in common," rather than to changes in church demographics.

According to Canadian census figures, Christians who define themselves as apostolic, born-again, evangelical, or who do not name a denominational affiliation, represented 2.6 percent of the population in 2001. This marks a 121 percent increase compared to 1991. During the same period, the number of people claiming affiliation with a particular Protestant denomination declined by 8.2 percent to 29.2 percent of the population.

Bill Blaikie, a United Church of Canada minister serving as a member of parliament, believes the growth in the numbers of those calling themselves evangelical may not be entirely bad news for social advocacy. "I am not as bothered as some Christian left wingers by all those Evangelicals out there. I see young Evangelicals as Christian capital," Blaikie, a member of the New Democratic Party and deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament, told Ecumenical News International. "They could be the ground from which a new social gospel movement could spring." He tells young Evangelicals: "The longer you think about things like poverty, the more you'll think like me."

Poland asks forgiveness for its priests



WARSAW, Poland (Zenit.org) – In a common petition, Polish Catholics prayed on Ash Wednesday for all clergy, and in particular those who had collaborated with the Communist regime. In an extraordinary meeting of the Polish episcopal conference in January, the bishops designated Ash Wednesday as a day of prayer.

The meeting was called after Archbishop Stanislaw Wielgus resigned Jan. 7, the day he would have been installed as head of the Warsaw Archdiocese, after admitting that he collaborated with Communist secret service. The bishops also decided to submit themselves to a voluntary examination of their past.

Cardinal Jozef Glemp, apostolic administrator of the Archdiocese of Warsaw, warned in a homily in St. John's Cathedral, that "there is among us too much feeling of enmity and too little feeling of forgiveness."

Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, archbishop of Krakow, said the current work to verify collaborationism that is being carried out in many sectors of society "to arouse suspicions and cause divisions is the 'post mortem' victory of the Communist system."

Auxiliary Bishop Piotr Libera of Katowice, said that Ash Wednesday's day of prayer and penance was lived as "an examination of conscience made in public, with great humility and sense of responsibility."

The bishop, who is also the secretary of the Polish episcopal conference, told the Italian newspaper *Avvenire*: "We turned to divine mercy asking for forgiveness for our errors and weaknesses in the transmission of the Gospel."

"In particular, we asked for forgiveness for those ecclesiastics who in the past collaborated with an atheist and Communist regime."

Indonesia

Papua, the Indonesian military and the USA

Elizabeth Kendal

The Indonesian military (TNI) has once again unleashed terror in the highlands of Papua. Thousands of indigenous, predominantly Christian Papuans have been ethnically cleansed from their villages and driven into the inhospitable jungle where many will die.

During the 20th Century, the Papuans turned from the occult, headhunting, cannibalism, and internecine tribal war to Christ. They were evangelized predominantly by Australian and American pioneer missionaries courtesy of Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) USA. The missionary story was popularized by missionary author Don Richardson, whose best-selling book "Peace Child" (now a feature film) tells how the Savi tribal practice of making peace with an enemy through the gift of a child opened the door for even the most violent Savi warriors to embrace the gospel.

Today the enemy of the Papuans is not their pagan tribal culture. Today nothing the Papuans do will bring peace. The TNI know they can kill Papuans with impunity. And what's more, the Papuans know it too. The contemporary still-unfolding story of Papua is a story of the genocide of a Christian people through betrayal and abandonment, aggression, complicity and impunity.

Sins of commission and complicity

Freeport McMoRan Copper and Gold Inc. first explored Dutch New Guinea (Irian Jaya, Papua), then a Dutch colony, in 1960. In 1961 Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, invaded the sparsely populated, resource-rich province and occupied it. In 1962 the US brokered a deal with the Dutch. Known as the New York Agreement, it handed sovereignty of Papua to the UN until a referendum could be held on the status of the province. In 1967, despite the fact that the UN was supposed to be in control, Indonesia gave Freeport "free rein" to take West Papuan land from the people, to resettle villagers and compensate them only for the buildings on the land."

In 1969 the UN, the US and other Western states with political and economic agendas facilitated Papua's annexation to Indonesia. Mining commenced in 1973, so did the protests, and so did the military reprisals.



The present day situation in Papua is complex and multilayered. It involves Indonesian and Islamic imperialism, racial and religious hatred, political expediency and complicity, greed, corruption and cover-up.

To 'Javanise' and Islamise Papua, Jakarta facilitates the mass migration of Javanese Muslims into Papua. It also strategically divided Papua into three provinces so that today Javanese Muslims are the majority in the majority of provinces.

There is little doubt that most Javanese Muslim immigrants view the indigenous Melanesian mostly Christian Papuans with contempt. Yet while the ethnic and religious hatred aspects intensify the hostility, they are not the root of the current crisis. The root of the current crisis is multi-layered:

- * The Indonesian military (TNI), which has an appalling record when it comes to corruption and human rights abuses, is determined to stay engaged in domestic security so it can operate and be close to its various business interests. (The Indonesian military raises most of its costs from its business interests, not the federal budget. The TNI's business interests range from legitimate investments and companies, to illegal logging, prostitution, drugs and extortion.) Accordingly the TNI needs conflict – it needs a real and present "separatist" and "terrorist" threat. Indonesia keeps an enormous military force deployed in Papua on account of this "sepa-

ratist and terrorist threat".

- * An American mining company is mining in Papua, which is a conflict zone. The insecurity cause by the protests of displaced, disgruntled locals, or by conflict between the TNI and the OPM (the primitive, not particularly threatening Papuan independence movement) means the mine requires protection. Those who work in protection (the TNI) therefore benefit from insecurity.

- * The American government's relationship with Indonesia is valuable and strategic both in terms of economics and geo-politics. The US is Indonesia's primary weapons supplier. Furthermore, Indonesia is an ally in the War against Terror. Hence this is a relationship that both Indonesia and the US are keen to protect.

Together these factors create an environment where the TNI, which secures its interests through conflict, knows it can persecute and kill Papuans with impunity, because the Indonesian and US governments and the directors at Freeport McMoRan Copper and Gold Inc. have political and economic reasons always to make sure the TNI's human rights abuses will be whitewashed.

Paying for protection

A detailed report entitled "Paying for Protection: The Freeport mine and the Indonesian security forces" was published by Global Witness in July 2005. It is essential reading for anyone seeking to

fully understand what is happening in Papua, and what is the relationship between the American Freeport mine, the TNI, and the gross human rights abuses perpetrated against the indigenous, mostly Christian Papuans.

Fake warriors

For many years now it has been known that TNI soldiers manipulate often illiterate, uneducated Papuan village men to be proud 'OPM' (Free Papua Movement) warriors! They arm these fake OPM and send them off to commit crimes and provocations that give the military grounds for retaliation against "separatist and terrorist" forces.

There are several differences however between real and fake OPM. Real OPM are few in number, isolated in the jungle, primitive and armed primarily with spears and bows and arrows. Fake OPM are armed with M16s and supplied with Indonesian beer and whiskey. TNI soldiers use these fake OPM for operations where they want deniability or for when they want to trigger a military crackdown.

Puncak Jaya, Dec 2006-2007

On December 8, 2006 two Indonesian soldiers were killed after a banned Papuan Morning Star flag was raised on Kumipaga Hill in Puncak Jaya. It is not clear exactly what transpired, but there are several signs that point to manipulation and the use of fake OPM to trigger an incident.

First, the flag raised on Kumipaga Hill was not a little hand-made flag but most unusually was a full-sized flag. Secondly, the soldiers who interrupted the event were not speared but shot with a TNI-issue M16 semi-automatic rifle (made in USA). On December 24, 2006, TNI, Brimbob (mobile brigade police), and intelligence agents were deployed to Pancuk Jaya for a military reprisal. The region is sealed off, closed to the outside world.

Since the military offensive commenced, an estimated 5,000 Papuan villagers have been forced to flee their homes, gardens and livestock. It is the wet season and the displaced, terrorized Papuan families are walking north and east over mountainous terrain, through thick jungle, without food, shelter or medical care. There is great concern that another TNI-engineered humanitarian crisis is unfolding.

TNI, Brimbob, and intelligence agents have since occupied some twenty vacated villages.

The TNI have been implementing the above pattern for years.

Freeport August 2002

On August 31, 2002 a group of unidentified gunmen ambushed a convoy of cars traveling between the Papuan regional centre of Timika and Tembagapura, near the Freeport copper and gold mine. Two Americans and an Indonesian were killed and nine foreign nationals, seven of them Americans, and three Indonesians, all teachers at the Tembaga Pura International School, were injured.

The attack took place close to a military checkpoint. The TNI, who were quickly on the scene claimed to have shot dead a Papuan OPM insurgent. After pointing out his body to the police, the TNI launched a military crackdown. However, evidence being gathered by Indonesian police indicated that the TNI was itself complicit in the attack. The evidence included the discovery that the Papuan body had actually been dead several days and planted at the scene.

The Global Witness report gives an excellent description of what happened in the weeks around and subsequent to 31 August 2002. This includes the fact that the police chief leading the investigation and his deputy who publicly accused the TNI were subsequently transferred out of Papua.

Continued on page 15

Family

The potter's hands

As we settled my mom's estate, I wanted to do something for my kids to remember their Oma by. Jack and I discussed various ideas and decided on a family trip to Barbados. In the years prior to my father's death at the age of 52, my parents had vacationed in Barbados five or six times. Once, as a teenager, I had accompanied them on one of their two-week trips to paradise. I was profoundly affected by the beauty of the island and its people, and understood fully why my parents returned as often as they could. Even in the last days of her life, when senile dementia had robbed most of my mother's memories, she was still able to talk about her times in Barbados with my father. Now it seemed totally appropriate to take our children to this tropical haven – in memory of their grandmother, and to make some family memories of our own.

she would actually come along.

Jack called our travel agent, who also happens to be a friend. We had spared the expense of cancellation insurance, but thought there might be some slim chance that we could trade Willene's plane ticket for one to B.C. There wasn't, of course. After talking to her family, Willene decided to come with us as planned.

And so, on a bitterly cold February morning, all six of us boarded an Air Canada jet bound for Barbados, "Gem of the Caribbean Sea." Willene was calm and quiet, doing her best to contain her grief. Looking at the sadness in her eyes, I couldn't help but wonder at God's timing. Still, he makes no mistakes and this whole chain of events held no surprises for him. I thanked the Lord for my husband and all my children, including Willene, and asked God

for an extra measure of his grace upon her.

After a day of traveling, we arrived like giddy school children at the resort. We eagerly banished our heavy jeans and sweatshirts to the closet and pulled on shorts and summer tees. Before long we felt right at home in the warm climate. In typical VanderSlikke style, we were always the first ones to arrive for supper and the last ones to abandon

the poolside tables at night. By day we soaked up the sunshine, snoozed on the beach and bobbed in the waves. In the evenings we played cards, laughed a lot and sampled all manner of fruity concoctions.

By Canadian standards, Barbados is a tiny island – a mere 14 x 21 miles at most. But the scenery that comprises its 166 square miles is nothing less than breathtaking. From the silky beaches of the Caribbean to the rugged cliffs of the Atlantic, with the mountainous interior and acres of sugar cane in between, one never knows what to expect around the next bend in the road. (And the roads bend often.)

One morning Jess, Stephanie, Jack and I ventured out on a 4x4 tour. James and Willene opted to stay home and enjoy the beach. Our first stop was Welchman Hall Gully. Descending the steps of the lookout there took me back to the time I visited with my parents. My dad particularly loved this place, in all its jungle-like glory. The humid air warmed my skin as my eyes adjusted to the dappled light, taking in the lush environment – bamboo, ficus, ferns, mahogany, orchids, bird of paradise and ginger lilies. I remembered standing there with Pa, watching him stoop to pick up nutmeg and pinching bay leaves for me to smell.

We piled back into the truck and held on for dear life as the driver wheeled up a dusty, winding hillside to Chalk Mountain. From up there you could see the Atlantic coast. The invigorating breeze provided a sharp contrast to the sultry air of the gully. I gazed down at the distant boulders of Bathsheba and remembered traveling these same roads in my parents' rented Sunmoke.

We climbed a set of steps and entered the pottery studio of a man named Winston. He took his place at the old fashioned kick-wheel and began working with a shapeless lump of wet clay. As he spun the mound in front of him he explained each stage of the pottery making process. I tried to pay attention to what he was saying, but found myself mesmerized by the rapidly changing shape of the clay. It morphed from an upside down flowerpot, to a pie plate shape, to a rimmed

dish, and finally to a delicately curved, perfectly symmetrical pot. Winston deftly flouted the edges with his fingers and held up the work of art he had created within minutes.

A week passed quickly. We took in a Bajan dinner show, visited Bridgetown, and the kids went on a snorkeling tour. We scarcely thought of the cold temperatures back home. All too soon the day arrived when our kids were scheduled to return to Canada. Jack and I would stay for one more week. I awoke that morning with exactly the same feeling in my stomach as I used to get when I had to send them back to school after summer vacation. As I hugged them goodbye I knew the tears in my eyes were unreasonable, but that didn't help.

What made me so sad, I wondered as I walked the beach later that afternoon? I thought about my parents and the time they spent here. How difficult their last visit must have been, since they knew

then that my dad had terminal cancer. I thought of Willene's Opa and how even 83 years fly swiftly past. And I realized that this trip – this precious family time – was now history, never to be lived again, except in our memories. I laughed a little as I considered maybe someday my kids would sit with me in a nursing home and say, "Remember Barbados, Mom? Remember the week we spent there together?"

And I thought of the potter's hands, how expertly and inexplicably they shaped a lump of clay into a beautiful vessel that no one else could have foreseen. That's where I am, and where I want to be – in the hands of the Master craftsman, a malleable mound, content to let him move me through the unpredictable processes of life, until it all turns out exactly the way he had planned from the beginning. The whirlwind journey won't be so scary if I can keep in mind that time and circumstance are just tools in the hands of the One who never changes.

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke



Two days before our departure our daughter-in-law, Willene, received word that her Opa in B.C. had died suddenly. On a bright Saturday morning he had made himself a cup of tea, settled into his favorite chair, and quietly slipped from this world into heaven. He was a spry 83 year-old, a gentle, kind-hearted, godly man who never let distance come between him and his family members in Ontario. Willene was devastated. My heart ached for her and I knew her first impulse would be to want to travel out west for the funeral. Our "trip of a lifetime" would now become bittersweet for her at best. For a while I wasn't even sure that



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Movie review

The Departed: violence, total depravity and identity

Harry der Nederlanden

With its excess profanity, vulgarity and violence, the film *The Departed* which received recognition as the best picture of 2006, should perhaps have been called *The Depraved*. Although it may not be the kind of film we wish to recommend to CC readers, it does merit our attention. It merits our attention not just because of its popularity or because it was directed by Martin Scorsese, one of the foremost filmmakers of our time. It also showcases in its art – and it is artistically well done – some of the central preoccupations of our time.

Although we may find the film hard to stomach because of its violence and profanity, it is worth reflecting on both as a mirror and meditation on our society and our age. I almost wrote “on American society,” for the film is set in Boston and deals with the Boston mob and the Boston police. But it’s based on a Hong Kong film called *Infernal Affairs*, so the situation is hardly uniquely American.

Does the film merit an award for the depth of its meditation on violence and human nature? I’m not sure that it adds much to the cornucopia of films that have taken violence as their subject matter. Yet, violence seems to be an especially attractive theme to filmmakers – perhaps because it draws large audiences. Clint Eastwood’s *Unforgiven*, Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, Coppola’s *Godfather* series, just to mention some that immediately come to mind, are all very violent films that are also reflections on violence, and they were done by some of the best directors in the business. They do more than simply add to the violence in our society. To argue that the high level of violence in our society justifies the making of violent films is more than a bit glib, but it is true that one cannot give a realistic portrait of our society – or of the condition of humanity in a fallen world, for that matter – without addressing and depicting violence. The Bible doesn’t side-step the representation of violence either.

Yet, I must admit that I was put off by *The Departed*. The closing shot focuses on a rat scurrying across the balcony railing of the apartment of a corrupt cop. The rat is superimposed on the golden dome of either a church or government building in the background. It’s an almost overly clear statement of one of Scorsese’s central themes. Human beings, from those in the underworld to those in power, as well as many of those in between, behave like rats.

In *The Departed*, for the most part, when it comes to the cops and criminals, law enforcers or lawbreakers, there isn’t a whole lot of difference. They are all driven by base instincts. And all are quick to resort to violence. You don’t walk away from this film with a higher esteem for humanity. If the film is no more than an abject surrender to the ubiquity of violence, what is there to recommend it?



Dicaprio with Nicholson

But must a film be edifying; must it build up our trust in some noble aspect of human nature? Calvinists especially are aware of the reality of original sin and human depravity. Does this film perhaps rub our noses in this truth about human nature? Nevertheless, is it enough to put human profanity, licentiousness, criminality, corruption and violence on display to tell this truth? Let’s come back to these questions after considering the film in more detail.

Violent symmetry

The Departed switches between two worlds, that of the police department assigned to prosecute the mob and the world of the mob. We are quickly introduced to two young men – Colin Sullivan (Matt Damon) and Billy Costigan (Leonardo DiCaprio) – both clever, handsome, intense young men (played by equally attractive young stars). Both have grown up in a neighborhood of Boston dominated by the Irish mob ruled with a bloody hand by Frank Costello (Jack Nicholson).

As it happens (by the luck of the draw?), the young Colin experiences the generosity of the crime boss Costello, who dispenses both life and death at his own whim, and young Colin is seduced by the dark side. Costello becomes his mentor and benefactor, raising him to become his inside man in the police department. Colin, clearly a gifted young fellow, rises swiftly in the police hierarchy and he is soon (extremely soon) in command of the organized crime unit. So he is put in charge of the very unit responsible for bringing his real boss to justice.

Also graduating from the police academy and coming from a similar background, Billy Costigan becomes a cop for very different reasons. Instead of blending with his background, he is determined to part ways with

it. As it happens, however, he is selected by the police brass for a special mission. He is selected not for his difference but because most of his family was associated with the Irish mob. This gives him the identity that will enable him to penetrate the Costello mob. Once in, Billy rises as quickly in the mob as Colin did in the police department.

So we have two worlds put side by side and two young men who are almost mirror images of one another. The symmetry goes further. Not only are both young men pretending to be someone they are not, they both have the same two bosses: while Colin’s real allegiance is to the mob boss Costello and his loyalty to the police chief is false, for Billy it’s the reverse.

Everything boils down to human desire, rhetoric (persuasive words), and power.

As the plot develops, both men learn of the existence of the other, though without learning the other’s identity. Much of the plot and the tension of the story derives from the expectation that sooner or later one of them will learn the other’s identity. And what will happen then? Enough blood and brains gets spattered about for us to know that the answer will not be pretty.

There are other symmetries. While Costello is exceptionally profane and obsessed with sexual rhetoric and power, the police sergeant in charge of Billy isn’t far behind in his use of sexual rhetoric as an instrument of power. He uses his power to fight mobsters like Costello, to be sure, and not to steal and murder, but he swings his weight around, brutally domineering others in much the same manner as Costello. Nor does he shrink from the ultimate act of violence when legal means fail.

Not only do Billy and Colin have similar bosses and live double lives in a pressure cooker, they both fall for the same woman, Madolyn, a psychiatrist who “treats” both of them (Yes, that’s a pun). To Colin, she’s the perfect partner for a successful officer of the law who is on his way to the top. To Billy, she becomes a kind of mother figure – and his sole point of contact with the “normal” world. Madolyn finds both types equally attractive – the undercover cop and the undercover criminal – because she can’t tell the difference.

That’s the point – the non-difference between

the two worlds and the two men.

Moral equivalence

This technique of placing the list of what we count as good alongside what we call evil has become a very common gesture in the university. Every culture, so the reasoning goes, develops a system of contrasts, but this distinction between good and evil, virtue and vice, justice and oppression does not name some transcendent reality. They are values projected by a particular society, so the “good” term gets its meaning simply by reason of being contrasted to the “evil” term. One culture celebrates loyalty and obedience; another celebrates independence, denigrating loyalty as subjection. One holds frankness in high regard; another sees it as rudeness or stupidity.

This neat symmetrical structure gives the film much of its elan and suspense, but I think that it undermines our emotional investment. It creates a kind of analytical distance. We are constantly aware at some level of this symmetrical contrivance that the opposites are the same. A=B. Whatever we read into one character we can also read into the other.

In a violent world, divided by a culture war and by a clash of civilizations, we often hear intellectuals asserting that one side is no better than the other, that one man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter. Everything boils down to human desire, rhetoric (persuasive words), and power. Others decry this “moral equivalence” with equally high-powered rhetoric. *The Departed*, in other words, gives us an exaggerated lens to examine the larger world order.

This idea that values are human fabrications is hardly a novel insight; in fact, it’s a bit of a cliché by now. This is where modernity has led us. Let’s do a quick review.

Movie review

Modernity set the rational subject over against the world of nature. At first human reason was thought to discern the order of nature to master it, but eventually human reason came to be regarded as the well-spring of all order and reason. Man no longer submits to the law but becomes the lawgiver. By his reason he will overcome the hardships that nature poses to human existence and create a social-democratic order that will provide freedom and well-being to more and more people.

That was the dream of progress pursued by modernity. Gradually modernists began to realize that imposing our will on a recalcitrant nature also involved imposing our will on our fellow man, who may have different ideas about the common good and who is to share in that common good. When there is no transcendent good to appeal to and to adjudicate between competing cultures, groups, classes, genders, and races, it all boils down to power. Culture, from law to religion, becomes a matter of self-assertion, and the one with the most desire (eros) and power will lay down the law.

Violence is not simply a side-product in a world so conceived. It doesn't just happen on the margins. Violence is endemic. To pursue one's desires and ambitions, to mold reality to one's will, is to engage in violence. Cogito ergo sum: I think therefore I am. I am therefore I dominate, oppress and kill. That's the law of power.

I am therefore I dominate, oppress and kill

[As an aside, if I recall correctly, Peter Berger made a similar argument concerning the world of religion many years ago. Calvinists especially like to talk of discerning and obeying the will or the law of God. But in a society where all truths must compete in the marketplace on a level playing field, no one can simply rest in the truth beyond the conflict of competing truths. We are forced to enter the fray and assert it as *our* truth. Even faith is forced to go on the offensive, to take the initiative. It cannot wait on God or defer to God's initiative. In other words, will or no, we must all behave as Arminians now. Faith can only be an aggressive act whereby we make room for God – or, as some would have it, paint a face on him (or her) with our own metaphors.]



Colin (Damon) with Costello (Nicholson)

Allegory of evil

But let's get back to the movie. Besides the two competing "heroes", who are both engaged in villainy, there is also the mob boss Frank Costello played by Jack Nicholson. He's an extremely loud presence in the center. Many critics have complained that Nicholson goes way over the top in his portrayal of the villainous mobster. And it's true – the role is played to excess. But it is written that way.

Scorsese gives us a crime boss who aspires toward the diabolical. Crime bosses have been portrayed as good fathers and churchgoers who just happen to be engaged in a business classed as illegal. That's definitely not Costello. This is a crime boss who enjoys mayhem, torture and killing men and women with as much relish as stealing, selling drugs and engaging in prostitution. He's the very incarnation of violation and violence.

At one point he tells Billy (the undercover cop) that once when he suspected one of his men might be a snitch, he simply killed them all. Another time he comes out of a back room, where he has been interrogating someone, with his hands covered with blood to the elbows. Costello often appears with a beautiful woman on each arm, but he confides to Billy that sex doesn't thrill him any more and that he's not running his numerous criminal enterprises to make money: he has plenty of that already. So why does he do it all with such gusto? To show that he is above the law, that he is a law unto himself, that he can exercise the power over life and death – in short, that he is god almighty.

Some have complained about the allegorical nature of the final scene with the rat, but here's an allegorical rat smack in the middle of the film – Costello. He is a pretty clear representation of self-assertion

aspiring to godlike stature – an embodiment of satanic ambition. In his wake he leaves blood and destruction.

The contagion of violence

So does *The Departed* do nothing more than confront us with this nihilistic world sustained by violence? I think the almost allegorical figure at the center of the story pushes the film to another level. It prompts us to step back to reflect on the way evil works in the world.

The film suggests two ways of looking at it. The rule – or rather misrule – of violence as orchestrated by Costello is so contagious that it infects not just the underworld and those who join it, like Colin, and even perhaps Billy, but an entire society – even those sworn to uphold the law and defend the community from this violence.

I was put off by the film's symmetry because it seemed to say that the cops are no better than the criminals. That sort of moral equivalence strikes me as repugnant and nihilistic. It would ally the film and the filmmaker with Costello in spreading the rule of violence.

But if the film is showing that the sort of evil loosed by Costello is so powerful that it can infect even those who fight it, that is quite different.

It's one thing, for example, to argue that democracies resort to violence and terror as much as (or more than) so-called tyrants and terrorist regimes. It's another to argue that the violence and terror sowed by tyranny infect and compromise even those who take up arms to fight it. To take a recent example, Saddam's rule of violence and paranoia (like that of Hitler and Stalin) spread throughout his regime and far beyond its borders. It sucked into its vortex also those determined to oppose it, on the right as well as on the left.

The film also yields another interpretation. If we begin with the symmetry and the moral equivalence between underworld and "overworld," since the two worlds are simply violent men seeking mastery over one another, we get a different kind of story. The film portrays the way many postmodernists see the moral order, that is, as an arbitrary imposition of difference where there is no natural or divinely ordained difference. The difference between good and evil is just a way a powerful group asserts its "natural" superiority and its right to dominate and exploit. In a world where there are no transcendent standards, where there are no truly ethical distinctions between vice and virtue, everything becomes indifferent. There is no reason to desire one thing over another, to value this way of life over that one.

Whether criminal or hero, sinner or saint, poet or putz, we are all dissolved into a slough of indistinction. There is only one way to acquire status or identity in such a world, and that is by violence, by imposing your will on those around you and crushing theirs. In a world where differences of quality and value no longer matter, scale is all. The human desire for identity and meaning becomes perverted into the diabolical desire to overrule.

Scorsese's vision is very reminiscent of the plays of Stephen Marlowe, Shakespeare's contemporary. At the end of the 16th century Marlowe already sensed where some of the aspirations of what we now call the Renaissance were headed: he saw that it concealed the desire of the human heart to arrogate to itself the right to be lawgiver and that this leads to violence and self-destruction.

From this perspective, *The Departed* becomes a moral critique of the nihilistic leveling that many see implicit in the worldview that has seduced much of Western culture since the rise of modernity.

The violence of the cross

In this season of Lent, it is appropriate to remind ourselves that Scripture addresses violence on the scale evoked by *The Departed*, and it puts it at the very center – on the cross.

What was it that drove the lawgivers of the Roman Empire and of Israel to do violence to the Son of God and the Son of Man? Wasn't it, at least in part, because they wanted to be in control: they wanted to keep for themselves the power of judgement and authority to sort out the sheep from the goats? The cross exposes even more radically the desire to play god residing in the human heart and in human institutions like government and religion.

The cross also shows that such justice is not only directed against one man, but against God – and that it ultimately redounds against ourselves. It is a form of suicide.

The Departed is not, of course, a film that leads to the cross of Christ – unless you begin there. In that context, I believe even a film as violent as *The Departed* opens up to the gospel.

Ecclesiastes

Laziness is a religious as well as a social problem

If a man is lazy, the rafters sag;
if his hands are idle, the house leaks.

Ecclesiastes 10:18

A. A. van Ruler

We must take good care of the things we need to live, such as the house we live in. That's the first thing that comes to mind when we read these words. This is not the first time the Preacher has said this. But in this verse he goes a little further.

He has pointed out that the fool doesn't take care of his tools and instruments (vs. 10). This is an expression of his folly, for it hurts no one but himself. He who cuts wood with a dull ax only has to work that much harder. His foolishness expresses itself as carelessness and negligence.

This is also a sign of inattentiveness. We must always be on our toes, for we must act at the right moment. If the snake bites before it is charmed, then the charmer is too late (vs. 11).

To the factors of careless negligence and inattentiveness, the Preacher adds the factor of laziness as an expression of foolishness. There is such a thing as a lazy person. He is someone who just doesn't get around to grabbing hold and fixing what needs to be fixed. He simply doesn't feel like it, or it looks like too much for him to handle. He is laid back, so he just lets it go.

This can bring unexpected consequences. Because of his laziness the rafters begin to sag, and because he doesn't lift a hand, the roof leaks. He lives in his house, going in and out every day. He sees it from the inside and from the outside. He sees what is wrong with it, and he thinks to himself, "That needs to be fixed and I'll do it pretty soon." But when the time comes, he puts it off to the next day. Meanwhile, the house continues to deteriorate. The rafters begin to rot or they become infested with termites. Finally the roof caves in. In the middle east, the flat roofs had to be replastered regularly; otherwise they would dry out, crack and begin to leak.

Isn't it a strange thing that some people can be so lazy? There are, of course, different kinds of people. Some are hard workers, always busy. They look for things to do because they enjoy it. When they are working for someone else, they don't see what they can get by with, they put out. It's a heartwarming sight to see a workman who doesn't just stand around looking or complaining but who quickly throws himself into the work entrusted to him. Some time ago from my office window I watched a man taking down some trees across the street, who really threw himself into his work. It is a welcome sight.

But there are other kinds of people too. Many workers look as if they are trying to get by with doing as little as possible. A man who was repairing our windows once told me quite frankly that he did as little as possible because all the profits went to his boss anyway.

This kind of laziness is a social problem. Nowadays workers are protected from being exploited by their employers, but sometimes it looks as if employers, and our entire society, need to be protected from being robbed by their employees.

This social and moral problem also has a religious dimension. For God's sake, we once again need to derive pleasure and satisfaction from work in and of itself – out of a deep conviction that life is serious and meaningful. The social problem of laziness is also a problem of faith.

But it isn't just a social problem with a religious dimension. In and of itself it is already an existential problem. How does a person come to be lazy? How is it



possible for someone to lose the will to work?
Isn't the deepest reason perhaps despair?

When my son was a little boy, he felt that dusting was senseless: it would soon be dusty again anyhow. Do adults perhaps reason the same way, albeit unconsciously? It all amounts to nothing, they believe: the world cannot be changed, and in the end we all die anyhow. There is no meaning to existence, so why should we exert ourselves? Let's just bask in the sun; let's just get as much enjoyment out of life as we can.

For some the despair becomes so deep that they can't even do that. They are so listless, all they can do is sit with their hands in their laps. We have all known such melancholy people. They are too miserable to lend a hand. Nothing seems worth doing.

The Bible has shaped Western peoples very differently. It has made us aware that the world is God's creation and that we have a calling, a task, a duty to do something. And it is worth doing because the world and humanity are on their way to a destination, so we must not surrender our humanity to sloth and laziness. In fact, these are forms of sinfulness, for our humanity is realized in the deed, in doing our work passionately and diligently.

Not that this is the sum total of our humanity. There is also the element of living-by-grace, there is also joy as the meaning of existence, and there is also praise. But besides the liturgy of worship in the church, there is also our work in the world. Besides Sunday as a day of rest, there are also our working days. Labor Day may not be on a par with Christian holidays like Easter, but we should celebrate it too.

The matter of laziness versus industriousness, apathy versus effort touches on the deepest issues of life. At issue is our total vision of reality. How much do we value the fact that the world and we ourselves are there? Do we confess with the Christian faith that it's God's creation and that we have a divine calling? Or do we go along with paganism and say that it is all a matter of demonic necessity, blindness and appearance? Or do we join the

modern philosophers in saying that it is all nothingness and absurdity? If human existence is absurd, what sense does it make to exert oneself, whether in the sciences or in the arts?

This is why faith is of fundamental and decisive importance for our life in the world. When you look at the way we work, Western peoples still give the Christian response, although we flirt a little with Buddhism and nihilism. But if we lose the Christian faith altogether, one day we will pay the consequences – not just in the hereafter, but in the present. We will lose our way here too.

The Preacher poses the question very concretely: so what if the rafters sag and the roof leaks? If everything is absurd and fleeting, does it matter whether we live in a solid, sensible house?

The Bible tells us, Yes, it does matter! We are creatures of God. As finite creatures of infinite worth, we should live with a bit of middle class stature. We should live in a solid and dry house. God's honor is involved even here. When we think things through to their metaphysical foundations, there is, as I see it, no other way to ground these homely observations than on the basis of the Christian faith.

THE HOPE CENTRE
will be holding a volunteer orientation session
Thursday March 22, 2007 from
7:30 to 8:30 pm.

We are an interdenominational Christian outreach in Brampton to the lost, the lonely, the specially challenged, to normal people, to children and others. Want a mission in your home town. Here we are. The orientation session will focus on how and what you would be doing. Christians with skills or a desire for: listening, witnessing, sales, secretarial areas, fundraising, planning, team building, or with another interest or skill set, who wish to see more people find Jesus or hear the Good News, are invited to attend. Our volunteers range from youth to those over 80 willing to spend several hours per week (per month) in sharing. Days or evenings are available.
Our address is: 160 Main Street South,
Unit 25 (Brampton Mall).
Contact Ed Appleton 905-790-2273 or attend our orientation.

Christian living

The real John Deere never got on a tractor



What do you think of when you see or hear the words "John Deere"? My guess is that you visualize a green tractor and a picture of a deer jumping over something.

Did you know that the man whose name is on all those green tractors and all that green farm equipment never drove a tractor? And probably never even dreamed that his name would be on all that equipment all over the world.

You see, John Deere was born 120 years before the first tractors were made. John Deere was a blacksmith. It was his second oldest son **his son**, Charles, who helped make John Deere a real success story. It's probably the only agricultural manufacturing company that didn't merge with other companies. And wasn't bought out. John Deere stayed John Deere.

The company registered record profits last year. Net income for the year was \$1.69 billion, up from \$1.447 billion the previous year.

John Deere was born in Rutland, Vermont on February 7, 1804. His father disappeared in 1808 after leaving to collect an inheritance in England. He was never to be heard from again. The ship probably went down in a storm.

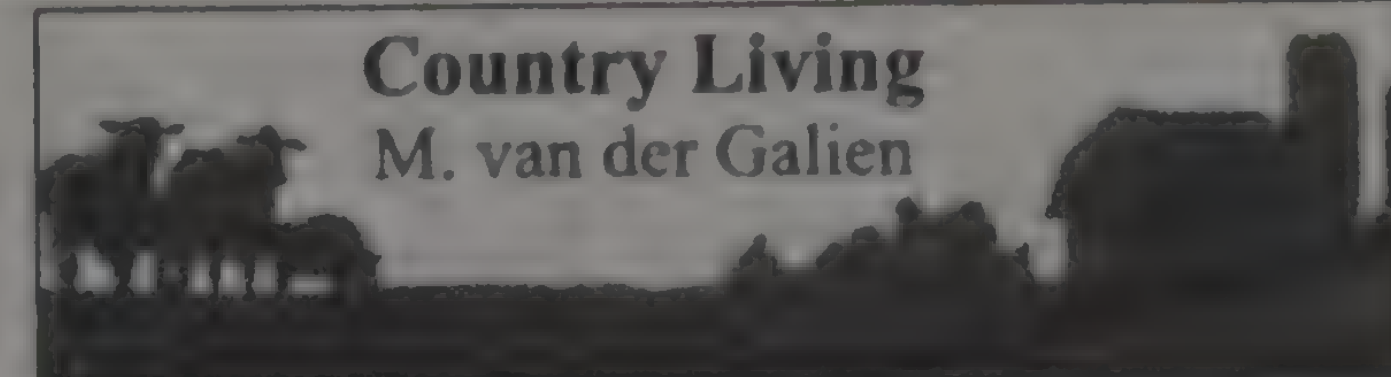
With five brothers and sisters, John and his family worked hard to make ends meet. He learned the Puritan values of hard work and honesty, which he would carry with him to Illinois. At age 17, John apprenticed with a local blacksmith, and after four years became a journeyman for another village shop.

As John grew up, Vermont no longer held the opportunities that had attracted an earlier generation of settlers. He made several attempts at starting his own blacksmith shop but always came out on the losing end, once even selling out to his employee.

He married in 1827 and his family grew, but all the while he was sinking deeper into debt. He had little choice but to leave his pregnant wife and four children behind and search for better opportunities on the Illinois prairie. His wife and family joined him later.

John Deere not only found work but also new challenges for his enterprising mind. Unlike the sandy New England soil, the prairie soil stuck to both the share and the moldboard of the plow. The farmers resorted to carrying a wooden paddle and stopping every few yards to scrape the sticky soil from the moldboards.

John Deere built his first 10 plows in 1839. John thought there had to be a better way than the oxen-pulled prairie breaker for farmers to plow their fields. While doing the traditional blacksmith's work of shoeing horses, repairing wagon wheels, and manufacturing iron goods, he considered how to build a better plow. In what has become American legend, John had an epiphany during a visit to his hometown Grand Detour Hydraulic Mill. He noticed the broken blade of a steel saw and asked if he could take it home.



John cut the teeth off the long blade with a hand chisel and sledge, then heated one small section at a time and molded it with a hammer and attached the steel blade to an iron moldboard.

He attached the moldboard to a wooden beam, to which he added two handles. His 1837 creation wasn't the first steel plow, and John never claimed to have invented it. Others had bolted used steel to cut the soil, but Deere's design was the best. His plow stayed clean and sharp and was said to sing as it cut through the tough prairie soil.

John began slowly shifting into the plow-making business. He built ten plows in 1839, 40 in 1840, and by 1842 John was hammering out 100 plows. In 1843 he ordered a shipment of special rolled steel from England. This steel had to be shipped across the ocean, up the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers by packet boat, and over land 40 miles to the little plow factory in Grand Detour.

John Deere was now producing 1,000 plows a year. John Deere vowed: "I will never put my name on a product that does not have in it the best that is in me."

John Deere died in 1886 at the age of 82.

Maynard van der Galien is an agricultural writer and beef farmer in Renfrew, Ont. He never owned a John Deere tractor.



Papua....continued from page 10

It is doubtless no coincidence that the attack occurred as Freeport was considering cutting its payments to the TNI on the grounds that investors were concerned that the payments, if deemed extortion, would be in violation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

On June 16, 2004 a federal grand jury in Washington DC indicted a Papuan named Anthonius Wamang for the August 2002 murder of the two Americans killed in the August 2002 Freeport ambush and the attempted murders of another eight.

The US Department of Justice subsequently issued an exuberant press release: "The U.S. government is committed to tracking down and prosecuting terrorists who prey on innocent Americans in Indonesia and around the world," said Attorney General Ashcroft. "Terrorists will find that they cannot hide from U.S. justice - whether in the world's largest cities or in the most remote jungles of Asia."

"The brutal terrorist attack charged in this indictment was an unprovoked ambush of an innocent group of Americans who were in Indonesia to teach school," said Assistant Attorney General Wray. "The Department of

Justice will work tirelessly to see that those responsible for such terrorist acts are brought to justice."

"This case is an example of outstanding investigative work and the dogged determination of FBI Agents and prosecutors to ensure that those who attack Americans abroad are brought to justice. I look forward to working cooperatively with the authorities in Indonesia as we pursue our mutual interest in prosecuting this defendant," said U.S. Attorney Wainstein.

Attorney Wainstein's assurance that Indonesia and America would pursue not justice but their "mutual interest" was probably what drove Wamang to flee immediately into hiding in fear of his life.

Wamang subsequently communicated to a journalist that he and fourteen others had been doing business with the TNI. He told reporters that they had been given ammunition and told that soldiers would be coming along the road. Wamang said he opened fire on the convoy believing that the vehicles contained Indonesian soldiers.

Wamang and eleven other Papuan "terrorists" were arrested in January 2006. They had turned themselves in to the FBI at the Timika hotel after being promised that they would receive a fair trial in the USA. Instead they were

handed to Indonesian authorities.

Among those detained was the Reverend Isak Ondawame, a well-known local pastor and human rights advocate who had helped arrange the meeting at the Timika hotel. Ondawame, who has been critical of Jakarta's policies in Papua, had not previously been identified as a suspect in the teachers' murders.

In November 2006, the Central Jakarta District Court, sentenced Wamang (32) to life imprisonment. His "accomplices" received up to seven years each.

The trial was a sham, but it did enable US military aid to Indonesia to be restored.

While Wamang admits to shooting at the convoy, the other men claim to be innocent. While waiting to hear the verdict, Reverend Isak Ondawame (54) said: "We had nothing to do with these shootings. Our trial has been manipulated for the interests of two countries, Indonesia and the United States."

The U.S. Foreign Relations Authorisation Act

America's Foreign Relations Authorisation Act for the fiscal year 2006-2007 contained a detailed section on

Continued on page 17

Environment

Gesch's Folly?

I've been digging holes for over fifty years. My earliest recollection comes from digging holes in the garden to bury garbage. Most of us did not know the word compost in those days. The hole had to be deep enough hold the garbage and a layer of soil deep enough to keep the neighbors' cats from exploring and distributing the garbage.

Another early memory involves direct instruction: "I want you to go to the garden and dig half a hole today; right now, no discussion."

So I went and dug a hole with a curved gravel shovel so that, looking from the top it resembled a half-circle.

"That ought to do it," I suspected, though with some doubts.

But it was not good enough for dad. "That's a whole hole," he said. "I wanted a half a hole."

I suspect that my father had been teaching some sort of lessons about homonyms or fractions to his seventh grade class. The lesson was quite beyond little me.

Then there were the two ravines in our area of relatively flat Wisconsin: the one with the headwaters of the small Black River my grandmother called, "The Oostburg Hole." Considering that Oostburg was our sports rival and home of James Calvin Schaap (who was interested – at that time – in my secret love), naming a "hole" after Oostburg seemed appropriate.

Our ravine was supposed to go by the name "Baar Crick." Grandma, an Oostburg native with no sensitivity to sports rivalry or the negative connotation of "hole," called the Baar Creek the "Big Hole." As in, "Were you kids spearing suckers in the Big Hole today?"

Then there were the "holes" that often contained bigger trout than the shallow riffles at the headwaters of our local trout streams. Or the rather shallow "holes," in the Onion River, pools actually over knee-deep!

When my father and brother bought some flood-plain farmland and began reversing the abuse it had suffered, they thought, naturally of planting trees, bushes, and . . . digging holes. I wasn't living nearby at that time, but remember being considered the "one who read all the time" and who might have some ideas about water and how to get it. I found an article about making small potholes that would make excellent duck rearing ponds, homes for muskrats, etc. Just right.

The making of these required only judiciously-placed dynamite. I mentioned this to one of my farmer friends, and he said, "Make sure you notify all the neighbors when you're going to do it. My neighbor blew some holes in the marsh and my horse kicked through his box stall and ran

through two fences from fear."

The necessary permits took some time to get. The holes – four of them, I think – were "blown" and we had ponds, holes filled with water.

Next I thought about the old oxbow of the Onion River. The river always flooded in the spring and the oxbow held water a little longer than the rest of the flood-plain. In fact, sometimes carp would stay in the flooded oxbow too long, and then small children armed with fishing spears had gory fun; raccoons feasted on fish for a while. Why not make that oxbow a more permanent water source?

So fish-and-wildlife regulations were read, permits were filled out and returned with more information required. And on and on. ("Must I have a permit to go to the bathroom?" one of my family queried, but with much stronger language.) Finally, with all the permits signed it was time to get the hole dug, and then the ducks would come, presumably in a row as described in the permit application forms.

We designed a lagoonish-looking pond with one steep side, dropping down to four feet, I recall. The other side was sloping up from the bottom for a couple feet, and then terraced so that there would be an underwater "bench" that would grow full of pondweeds, nurture insects, and attract ducks and muskrats. A local bulldozer operator did the work.

Dad planted alsike clover on the earth dike "spoil" as required by permits. By the end of a year, we realized that that oxbow would be a magnet for wildlife. Canary grass and other weeds "grew in", soon replacing the alsike clover. Another successful hole.

When my wife and I finally bought a house of our own it had a nice "hole" in it: a beaver pond at the far edge of the property. There were ducks there, beavers (of course), even moose wading in to graze on water weeds. That pond, however, helped flood a neighbor's property and – much to our sorrow – the dam was breached, the beavers destroyed, and we owned only a "former hole."

Where we live, farmers like dugouts, holes built on hillsides that are shaped to catch snowmelt and bermed to raise the water level. Our house, however, sits on the flat, and we wanted a hole closer to home. It couldn't be next to the side yard because that is where the septic drainage field was.

There was another problem: our house sits on an old marsh or lakebed with 8 inches of loam and then sandy soil beneath it. Would a hole hold the water, or would its level fluctuate with the rise and fall of the water table?

Finally, we decided to take a chance. Today I announce to all and sundry: the hole-digging has begun. We're making an L-shaped, boomerang-shaped, elbow-shaped, or (yes!) oxbow-shaped pond that will drain some boggy spots in the hayfield that love to capture tractors.

The finished pond will, we hope, attract wildlife: ducks, shorebirds, swallows.

It will provide a bounty of insect life and aquatic weeds.

I'm sure frogs, toads, and salamanders will find some use for the pond.

The garter snakes will find some use for the frogs, toads, and salamanders.

Deer, moose, bear, foxes, and



coyotes – to name only the larger mammals – will have one more watering hole.

Predators will find lots of mice and voles – maybe even muskrats eventually – living on the grassed and treed shores of the pond.

If... again if... everything works out well, there may be a possibility of planting trout in the pond. Maybe I'll even brave the sure-to-appear leeches and take a dip now and then.

Why spend a few thousand dollars and lots of work on digging a hole when we can't even be sure of direct benefits to ourselves? Certainly without possibility of profit other than some better-drained farmland that we rent out anyway? Why put in hours and hours of planting grass and trees when we might not even get a pond?

The short reason is love of wildlife, God's non-domesticated creatures. And when it comes to life, domesticated or wild, water is the key. Water nourishes life. Plants thrive, animals thrive: more species flourish (as long as we can keep human beings with their sprayers and mowers away from the edge of the water).

But what if? What if the pond level fluctuates with the water table? What if it is dry in the summer?

I suppose there are a lot of answers. Like this: "Does the possibility of a dry hole keep an oil company from drilling?" Or think of Robbie Burns' words: "The best-laid plans of mice and men go oft awry [gang aft agley]."

Or think of Seward. William Henry Seward was a U.S. cabinet minister who accomplished the purchase of Alaska from Russia. He paid an apparently exorbitant price of \$7,200,000 (about 2 cents an acre) for that state and was mocked for his foolishness. Alaska was termed "Seward's Ice Box" or "Seward's Folly." Maybe we'll name our excavation "Gesch's Folly."

At any rate, our farm will have a big hole in the field. A whole hole. (I think.)

Curt Gesch is a twice retired teacher who has discovered more holes in his life.

Flowers & Thistles

Curt Gesch

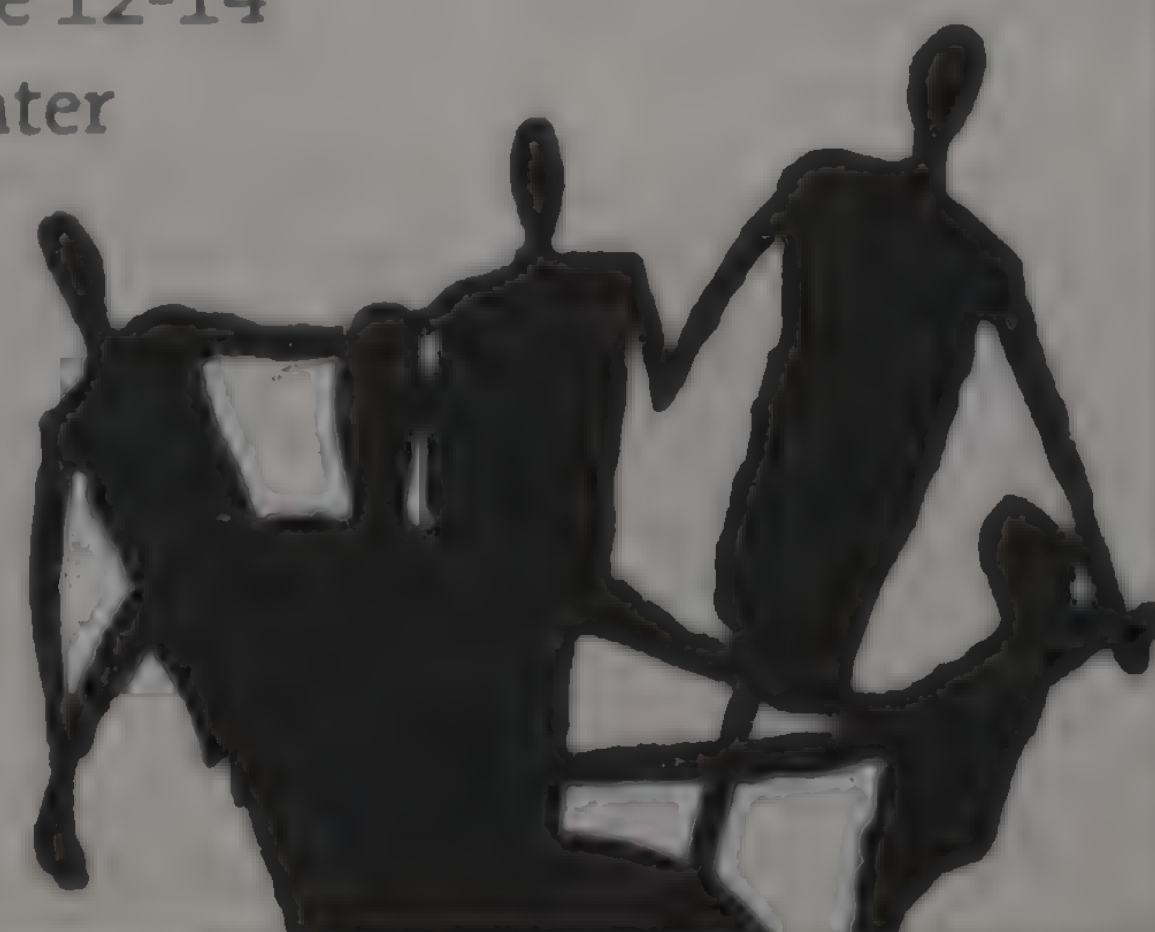
Surrounded by a Cloud of Witnesses

Hebrews 12:1

You are invited to celebrate and affirm the full inclusion of women in CRC leadership.

Gather at Synod 2007 from June 12-14 in Calvin College's Fine Arts Center

Contact Cloud of Witnesses at 616-241-1679 for more information, including lodging. Tax deductible contributions to support this witness may be made to Classis Grand Rapids East, 1239 Fuller SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506



Details

We think in generalities: but we live in detail

Indifference – not caring about, or even paying attention to your mate – is one of the worst forms of cruelty in a marriage.

Daniel Goleman, author of *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*

Twice she returned to the marriage to make it work. They had two sons and one daughter. The third time she had to make a decision for or against the marriage she asked him to leave. Their children would be teenagers soon and she was not going to expose them any longer to their father's angry outbursts and other aggressive behaviors. After a period of mourning for 'what could have been' she and her children settled into a routine that brought calmness and harmony to the home. Years later her children thanked her for allowing them to be teenagers in a home filled with love, routine and predictability. The divorce brought this family "something better and something different."

They have been married for twenty years and have two children. He is committed to the marriage and the family. His wife's career is more important to her than marital or family life. There has been little or no intimacy for years. She is not interested in counselling. He is staying in the marriage for the sake of the children until they are on their own. He will be in his mid fifties at that time.

Last month I wrote about Ms. Bair's – author of *Calling it Quits: Late-Life Divorce and Starting Over* – surprise findings that late life divorces were caused by a "lack of communication" (rather than infidelity). Her findings support other empirical studies that show for marriages which do not succeed, only 40 percent report severe fighting as the cause. The other 60 percent cite a gradual drifting apart.

Throughout history marriage has served many different purposes (more about this next month) ranging from procreation, companionship, convenience, status, need, and of course – love. Yet, divorce statistics show "love" is not enough because more than half of our marriages end in divorce

and those who remain married are not always happy.

Love in contemporary marriages is expressed through the quality of emotional bonding between two spouses. The quality of the bond reflects, for both spouses, the answer to the question "Can I count on you to be available and responsive when needed?" While it is not difficult "to be available and responsive" during the romantic stage of a relationship, it becomes more complicated when reality sets in. No longer putting our best foot forward we resort back to a coping style rooted in our childhood experiences as well as develop a way to work through the challenges of every day life while trying to get our needs met in the marriage.

Some years ago, I wrote a column on "The Chilling Dance of Connection" in which I outlined four coping styles for connections that influence how we communicate with our spouse. They are "secure," "anxious," "avoidant fearful" and "avoidant dismissing." At that time I wrote that in the secure style we view others as lovable, reliable and responsive. Expectations are positive and we readily develop trust and closeness with our spouses. In the anxious style there is uncertainty about the lovability, reliability and responsiveness of others. This influences our expectations of one another as well as our ability to develop emotional closeness. In the avoidance styles there is mistrust of others and so our expectations are often negative causing us not to develop the trust and closeness we need as partners in life. (Susan M. Johnson)

In summary, the building blocks of secure bonds are healthy emotional accessibility and responsiveness to one another. Sustaining this bond will predict long-term marital satisfaction. An inability to sustain the bond leads to alienation and mistrust, which over time turns into 'stoic indifference and/or mutual misery.' When we understand the above coping styles we not only realize "lack of communication" is a set of complex interactions, but we can, if we want to, move from alienation and mistrust to some level of compassion and hope.

What is most helpful for distressed couples is for each person to focus on themselves, rather than on what the other is or is not doing. Sometimes, change within one person can bring about change in the other. If we are interested in nurturing and sustaining the bond we have with our spouse we need to be aware of how our interaction disrupts this bond. Therapists are often fond of asking: "what happens to you when he says...or what happens to you when she tells you...?" These questions can be uncomfortable, yet they are necessary if we want to gain self-awareness in terms of what we are feeling, thinking and doing in our marital relationship.

Those of us, who have been married for some time, know that under stress we quickly fall into predictable patterns of communication as we try to work through various challenges. We even tell each other "here we go again." Often very little is resolved when all is said and done and frustrated spouses retreat in their own protective corners of the house while nursing their disappointments with one another once again. Studies have shown, however, if spouses become more aware of their internal responses (feeling and thinking) and work at changing them there is hope for the relationship.

During the last decade, researchers have found three main patterns of internal responses that disrupts the bond rather than nurture it: 1) when we get caught in the "pull" of an internal response and are unable to do what is needed (e.g. when the 'anger program' kicks in and we just cannot listen to our spouse when it would ultimately be to our benefit to do so, 2) we avoid doing or saying needed things because to do so would likely trigger an uncomfortable internal response in ourselves (i.e. when we are unable to admit when we are wrong, because doing so triggers an anxious or vulnerable state in us), 3) when a needed response simply doesn't show up (when we need to respond to our spouse with tenderness or caring but we are occupied with other things). Researchers have found these three habitual interactions between couples, disrupts the emotional bond over and over

Getting Unstuck Arlene Van Hove



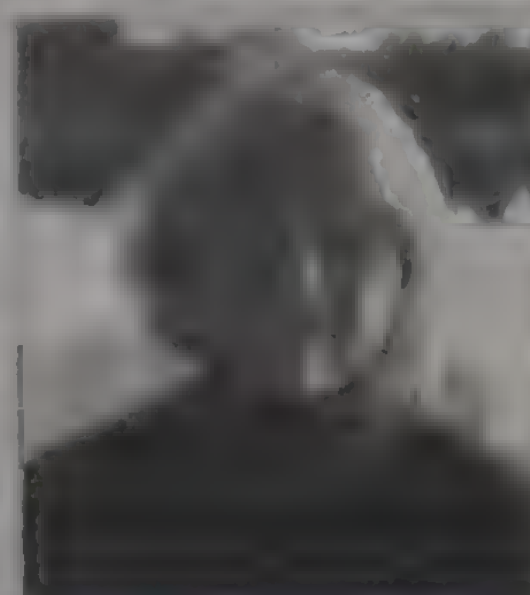
Scene from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*

again. (Brent J. Atkinson). In simpler terms, we experience these interactions as not being able to count on our spouse to be available and responsive to our needs. Consequently, it is not surprising couples eventually become indifferent to one another and end up in mutual misery.

At the same time, there is hope for distressed marriages if the willingness to become self-aware and to change is evident. Some couples come to a point in time, before there is too much water under the bridge, when they would do "anything" to save their marriage. Sometimes, that entails becoming educated in marital and family dynamics, being honest with one's own shortcomings and being forgiving in terms of oneself as well as one's spouse.

(Last instalment on late life divorces next month)

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

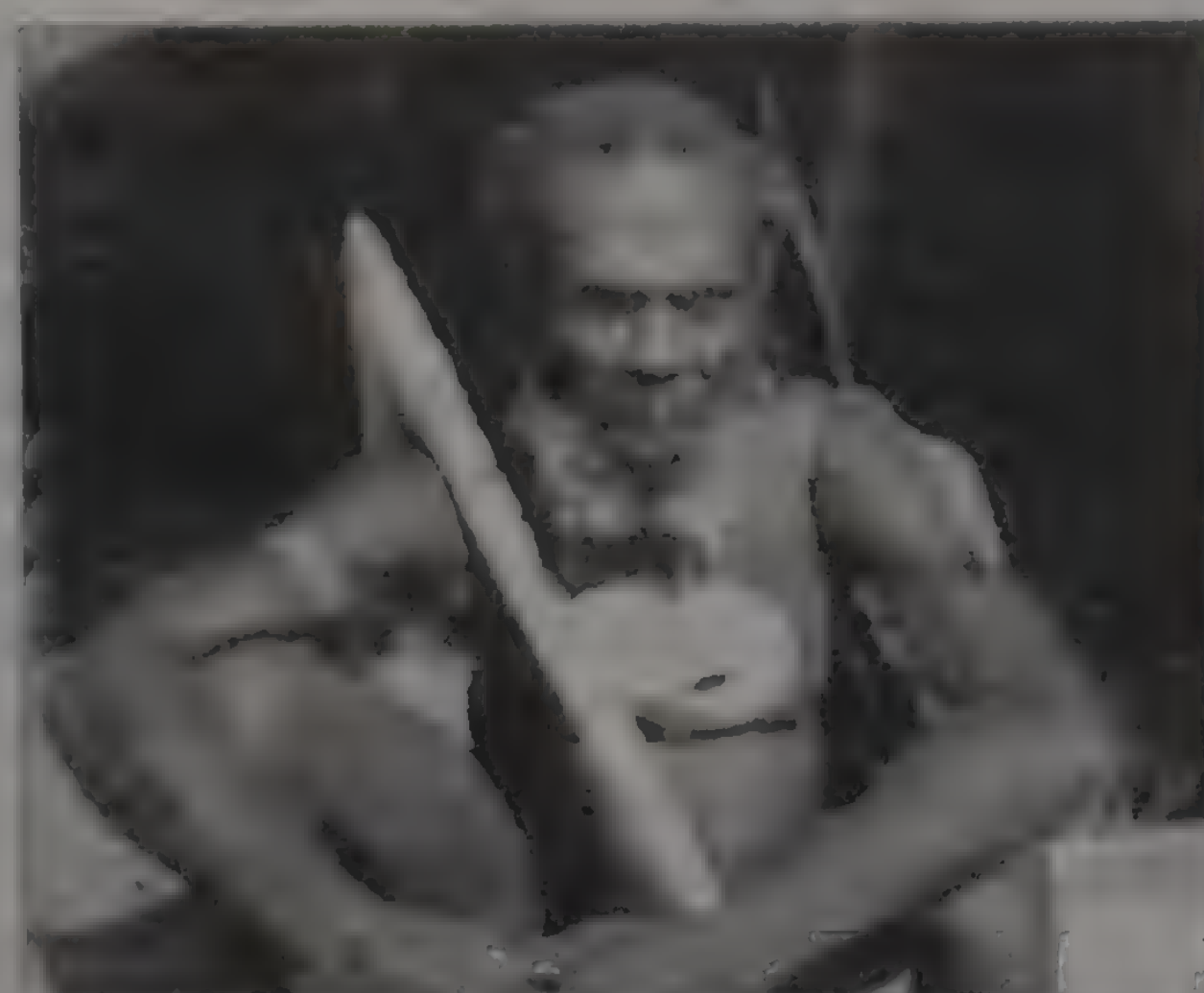


Papua....continued from page 15

Papua (section 1115) which required that further reporting be undertaken regarding the implementation of Papua's Special Autonomy Law; human rights, openness and liberties in Papua; and the 1969 Act of Free Choice.

Needless to say, the Indonesian government was displeased. So to make the Indonesians happy, the American government agreed to remove the references to Papua.

On November 9, 2005, the *Jakarta Post* reported: "Indonesia has greeted with a sigh of relief a decision by the United States Congress to omit references to Papua from the State Department Authorization Bill." President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono reiterated



Indigenous Papuan during early mission days.

that Papua was "Indonesia's domestic affair," while international affairs expert Dewi Fortuna Anwar said the removal of the refer-

ences to Papua was "a friendly gesture by the United States in respecting the integrity of Indonesia. We should welcome the efforts by all sides in favor of Indonesia both inside and outside Congress to scrap the references to Papua in the bill."

Papuan genocide

Indonesia is important both economically and geo-politically. But policies being enacted by the Indonesian government and the TNI are effecting the genocide of the indigenous predominantly Christian Papuans.

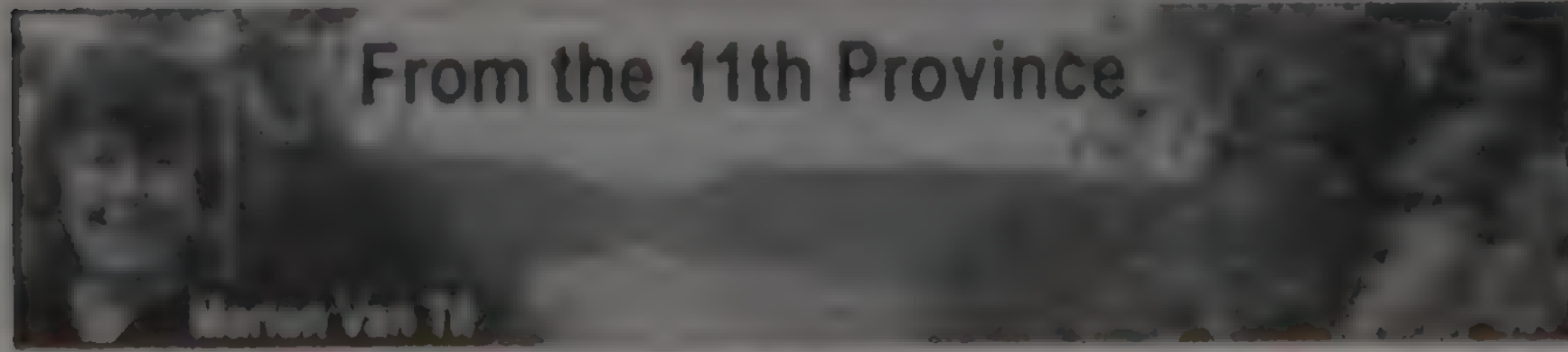
There will always be in every country government officials and CEOs who are prepared to put political and economic in-

terests ahead of human life. Because of this it is left to those voters and investors who are not prepared to be complicit in human rights abuses and genocide to exert their power to force change. The impunity must end somewhere.

Freeport should be made to cease operations in Papua and the US government should be made to cease military aid to Indonesia until the human rights situation in Papua is corrected and Papua's Special Autonomy Law is fully implemented to the satisfaction of indigenous Papuans.

Elizabeth Kendal is a researcher for World Evangelical Association's Religious Liberty News & Analysis

Reflections



From the 11th Province

Last month in this space I wrote about the faith of 17th century Christian poet/pastor/hymn-writer George Herbert. February 27 was Herbert's birthday and his "festival day" in the Anglican and Lutheran traditions. Birthdays are convenient dates on which to remember and give thanks for the lives, work and witness of such historical Christians (and, not incidentally, for the faithful Christians in our own lives).

As I said last month, such remembrance and thanksgiving are not primarily to honor a particular person for his or her "greatness," but to honor God for having given such people to us and to the secular world as Christ's witnesses. If parts of the Anglican Communion don't seem to appreciate Herbert's lay-it-all-out, seven-day-a-week faith as much as they once did, I know from periodic conversations (and responses to last month's column) that his nearly four centuries-old poetry is indeed alive and well for many Reformed Christians today.

Another historical Christian whose work is still affecting us deeply also had a birthday in February (on the 23rd,) and for the same reason as for Herbert we would do well to give him a festival day: George Frideric Handel. You and I can give thanks for his music any time we hear it, of course – and for the ways in which the Gospel still comes through in his biblical oratorios, despite attempts to de-Christianize them.

Abundant musical, literary talent

March is now half over and there is another poet and hymn-writer I'd like you to meet, whose festival was earlier this month. You'll know his name, certainly, but perhaps have never thanked God for his work and it's affect on your faith, whether you're aware of it or not. This man lived a century later than Herbert, lived twice as long (to age 81) and wrote far more prolifically. The products of his prodigious mind and pen – at least 6,000 poems – were to be set to hymn tunes; so he is known as a hymn-writer more than a poet, though his hymn texts surely classify as poems. He was Charles Wesley (1707-1788).

If you were to look under the name Wesley in the "Authors, Composers, and Sources" index in the *Psalter Hymnal* (the Christian Reformed Church's official hymnal), you would see that the book contains 14 of Charles Wesley's hymns, one by "Charles Wesley (the younger)" and two by Samuel S. Wesley. Poetic and musical ability were deeply stamped into the family genes. Charles the Younger and Samuel S. were both sons of the famous Charles – who himself first came into public view as a side-kick to his already more famous brother John, the founder of Methodism. ("Samuel S." was so designated because his grandfather – John and Charles's father – was also named Samuel.) Both of these sons of Charles were composers/organists and poets, in that order. And Samuel S. was one of the foremost English church composers of the 19th century; much of his music is still available.) Charles Wesley himself deeply loved music but his primary talent lay in writing – in writing texts that would take on a second life when set to music.

'Rejoice, The LORD is King!'

Since I mentioned Handel earlier, one of the fascinating footnotes of history is the thin though important line of connection between Handel and Charles Wesley – or at least between their art. Wesley was a great admirer of Handel's music. They both lived in London but it isn't certain that they knew each other personally (despite some Internet stories that insist they met and were friends). What is known is that in 1747, when Handel was 62 and Wesley was 40, Handel set to music three of Wesley's hymn texts. They are the only three hymn-tunes Handel ever wrote. (Some of his other music is used as hymn tunes; and "Joy to the World,"

commonly thought to be by Handel, is by Lowell Mason in Handelian style, while Isaac Watts, the other exceptional 18th century English hymn-writer, wrote its text). As things turned out, Wesley never found out that Handel set any of his texts. Samuel S. stumbled upon the existence of the hymns after his father's death.

Well-grounded Christian that Handel was, he must have appreciated the biblical-theological depth of Wesley's texts, and likely wrote them for Methodist friends of his. He took them from a then recently published Methodist hymnal and set them to his own (far superior) tunes, attaching to them the two-part titles used in that hymnal: 1. "The Invitation: Sinners Obey the Gospel Word"; 2. "Desiring to Love: O Love Divine, How Sweet Thou Art"; 3. "On the Resurrection: Rejoice, the Lord is King." (I'm still disappointed that Handel's magnificent tune for "Rejoice, The Lord is King!" – tune name GOPSAL – does not appear in the current *Psalter Hymnal*; nor are Handel's other two hymn tunes on Wesley texts known in Reformed circles.)

'Pierce the gloom of sin and grief'

The abundant musical and literary talent in the Wesley family must have brought them much joy. But within the marriage-and-family context of Charles Wesley and his wife, Sarah, we see that joy also offset by much sorrow. Charles and Sarah had eight children. They lost five to death. Only Charles the Younger, Samuel S. and one of their sisters (Sarah, after her mother) lived to adulthood. High infant mortality rates, as modern social scientists would call them with cold statistical eye, were still common in the 18th century. If you look through historical records, or simply at birth-death dates and family information of just about anyone from that period (as well as from the centuries before, of course, and then in the other direction through much of the 19th century) you will uncover couple after couple, family after family, who lost child after child.

Some students of such things have assumed that people must have somehow "gotten used to" the pain of all that inevitable death: marriage meant having children; having children meant some, or perhaps many, would die before adulthood. I think we cannot assume that the cold commonality of such loss made the anguish of parents commonplace, numbing its effect.

'He breaks the power of canceled sin'

What *did* make such losses bearable – which secular historians don't generally consider or understand – was the still near universal belief in and reliance on God as the sovereign Lord of all creation, and our Saviour and Redeemer. "God moves in a mysterious way," wrote another 18th century poet/hymn-writer, William Cowper (pronounced Cooper). But God will ultimately do what's best for us. He promises it and *does* it. Despite his perfect record (which we don't always interpret that way), we tend to disbelieve him and think we need to rely on ourselves. But along with Job, Wesley and his fellow Christians confessed: "The LORD giveth, the LORD taketh away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." Wesley's hymns "bless the name of the LORD," first and foremost, and in everything, despite his own or anyone else's personal circumstances. What stands out when you sing hymn after Wesley hymn is that God is the subject and the praise of God our obligation, but also our joy.

Such profound trust in God despite deep trauma and the encompassing effects of evil is reminiscent of the Psalmists. This trust both hangs on and is fed by a deep love for God and intense thanks for having been led by Christ out of the abyss that our sin has carved between us and God. Charles Wesley's hymns give us profound words to praise the God "whose kingdom cannot fail" and to exult the Christ who

was "once for favored sinners slain." In the process, these hymns also teach us much biblical theology.

As much as I love singing (and accompanying) hymns, I've found that even my favorites take on additional meaning when I read them carefully as poetry every now and then. The hymn text below will give you an opportunity to do that. It makes an excellent Lenten meditation.

*And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

*'Tis mystery all: th'Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;
Let angel minds inquire no more.*

*He left His Father's throne above
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!*

*Long-my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

*Still the small inward voice I hear,
That whispers all my sins forgiven;
Still the atoning blood is near,
That quenched the wrath of hostile Heaven.
I feel the life His wounds impart;
I feel the Savior in my heart.
I feel the life His wounds impart;
I feel the Savior in my heart.*

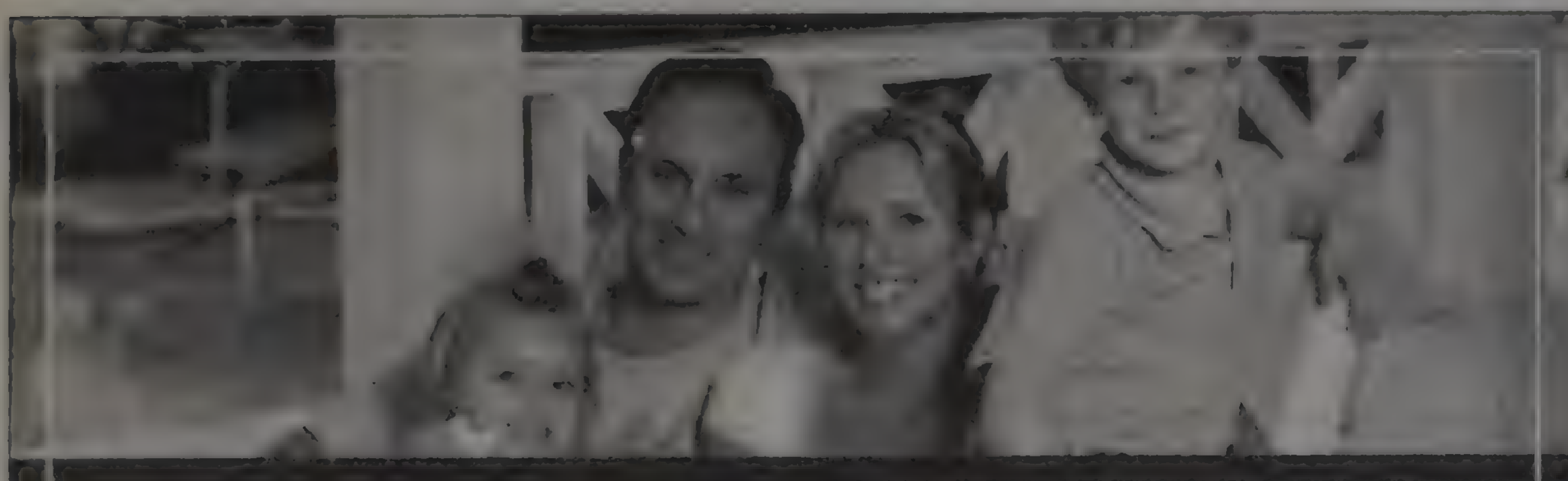
*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own*

(Tune: SAGINA. Text from Wesley's *Psalms and Hymns*, 1738.)

*See also Lo! He comes with clouds descending, and
See, sinners, in the Gospel glass*

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at <mvantil@adelphia.net>.

Classifieds



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Classifieds

Birthdays		Anniversaries		
<p>On March 16, 2007</p> <p>Jeene Amsing</p> <p>will celebrate his 80th Birthday</p> <p>Your children:</p> <p>Andre & Roselyne Steve & Estelle Jim & Thelma Coby & Irvin Bert & Veronica Elizabeth & Rick Tom & Kathy</p> <p>grandchildren & great-grandchildren</p> <p>We are thankful to the Lord for you. May God continue to bless you each and every day with his abiding love and grace.</p> <p>We are all looking forward to seeing you in July for 2 weeks. Happy Birthday, Dad!</p> <p>Correspondence address: Box 491, Clinton ON N0M1L0</p>	<p>With thankfulness to God, the family of</p> <p>Jacoba (Coby) Karreman (Kulper-van de Wal)</p> <p>hope to celebrate the occasion of our mother's and grandmother's 90th Birthday on March 24, 2007</p> <p>Christina & Gerald Pleizier Jonathan, Naomi Elske Kuiper Al & Ghislaine (†) Kuiper Nick Cathy & Dirk Van Starkenburg Sharon & Steve (Logan) Heather Maria & Jeff Sandra Elisabeth & Pierre Cory</p> <p>An Open House will be held at Peter D Clark Centre, 9 Meridian Place, Ottawa, Ont. 2-4 p.m. on Saturday, March 24, 2007</p> <p>Correspondence address: Christina Pleizier 3580 Birchtree Cr, Navan ON K4B 1N6</p>		<p>Great is Thy Faithfulness!</p> <p>Our special parents</p> <p>JOHN AND WILMA (nee Lautenbach) PEEREBOOM</p> <p>will celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary on March 16, 2007!</p> <p>Children: Peter (Christine), Victoria, BC William (Connie), Victoria BC Theresa (Ron), Edmonton, AB</p> <p>Grandchildren: Shariene, Daryl, Christopher, Richard, Nicole, Michael, John and Andrew</p> <p>We are having an Open House to celebrate this time with our parents: Date: Saturday, March 24, 2007 Time: 2 - 4 p.m. Location: First Christian Reformed Church 661 Agnes Street, Victoria, BC</p> <p>Our parent's address: Mr. & Mrs. J Peereboom 530 Broadway Avenue Victoria BC V8Z 2E8</p>	<p>With joy and thanksgiving we, the children and grandchildren of</p> <p>HENK AND LIENEKE SNETLJES</p> <p>are able to celebrate 50 Years of Marriage!</p> <p>Thanks for your love and care and for your faithful commitment to the Lord.</p> <p>Love from, Jennifer & Gerald Hoftzyer, Trenton Ben, Alex & Natalie Harriet & Rob Frankruyter, Brampton Alaina Marion & John Heeringa, Carrying Place Sharolyn & Ryan Ron & Patricia Sneltsjes, Milton Liana & Jasmine</p> <p>Open House: Saturday March 31, 2007 2-4 p.m. @ Emmanuel Baptist Church 2 Corey Street, Bloomfield</p> <p>Home address: Box 179 Consecon ON K0K 1T0</p>
<p>Engagements</p> <p>Please see on page 21</p>				

<p>Betterwird, Friesland Brampton, Ontario Feb. 11, 1928 Feb. 14, 2007</p> <p>DICK WYGA</p> <p>went peacefully home to be with his Lord and Savior with his family surrounding him.</p> <p>Dear husband of 54 years: Agnes Wyga (nee Straatsma)</p> <p>Loving heir to: Otto & Anne Sonya & Gerry Nap Andy Calvin & Mary Fred & Diane Sandy & Steve Biffis-kri</p> <p>Beloved pake of 18 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren.</p> <p>Also missed by brothers, sisters and families here and in the Netherlands.</p> <p>A celebration of Dick's life was held at the Second CRC Brampton, Ontario on Monday Feb. 19, 2007.</p> <p>Correspondence can be sent to Agnes Wyga 202 King Towers 35 Kingknoll Drive Brampton ON L6Y 5G5</p> <p>Or by going to the bluespringsfuneralhome.com</p>	<p>Heeg FR Abbotsford B.C. Nov. 21, 1918 Feb. 23, 2007</p> <p>The Lord took home into his care our dear sister-in-law</p> <p>ANN STEENBERGEN RUDOLPHI</p> <p>Loving wife of Tim Steenbergen</p> <p>Arendina Hessels, Dwingeloo DR Emie Steenbergen, Penticton BC Henry & Lammie Rumph, Grimsby Ont. Gerry & Swansea Fluit, St. Catharines Ont. Tiny Vanden Berg, Drayton Ont. Hilbert de Roo, Strathroy Ont. Tieme & Fygje van Dyk, Ruinerwald DR Roelof & Janny Steenbergen, Koekange DR Hendrikus & Lutina van der Veen, Aalsmeer NH</p> <p>Predeceased by 3 sisters-in-law & 4 brothers-in-law.</p> <p>May the Lord comfort her husband Tim and children, grandchildren and great-grandchild.</p>	<p>HENDRIK WILLEM CHRISTIAAN HELLEMAN</p> <p>The Hague, Netherlands Ottawa, Ontario February 24, 1920 February 25, 2007</p> <p>Early Sunday morning, February 25, the Lord called home his faithful servant, husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, Henk, leaving behind his loving wife of 63 years, Tess, and his children, Adrian (Wendy), Folkert (Ellen), Hank (Caroline), Hans (Henni), Mary Breimer (Theo), Eveline De Vries (Albert).</p> <p>He is also remembered lovingly by his 17 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.</p> <p>A service to celebrate his life was held on Thursday, March 1, 2007, at Calvin Christian Reformed Church, Ottawa.</p> <p>Correspondence: Eveline De Vries 54 Otten Drive, Nepean ON K2J 1J2</p>	<p>The Lord called to himself, peacefully at home,</p> <p>BENJAMIN VERMEER</p> <p>on February 22, 2007 in his 72nd year.</p> <p>Loving husband of Bertha (nee Gils) for 47 years. Cherished father of Jane Mulder (Harry) of Ottawa, Albert (Christina) of Sarasota, Florida, and Denise Vermeer (Denis Robert) of Grimsby.</p> <p>Proud and loving Opa of: Devin, Sheena, Brianna, Jeff, Rhonda, Scott and Paul (Melissa).</p> <p>Dearly missed by his brothers and sisters Anne Boekestyn (Pete), Bill (Mary), Shirley Bergshoeff (John), Abe (the late Elizabeth, 2006) Dick (Mary), Janette Schaafsma (Joe) and John (Helen).</p> <p>Also missed by brother-in-law Simon VanDyken and sisters-in-law Liz Geerlinks, Helen Edwards (Frank) and many nieces & nephews.</p> <p>A Celebration of his life was held at Fruitland Christian Reformed Church on February 26.</p> <p>Correspondence: B. Vermeer, 18 Red Haven Dr, Grimsby ON L3M 5J7</p>
<p>On February 20th, 2007 in his 73rd year, with loved ones at his side,</p> <p>CLARENCE SCHEEPSTRA</p> <p>of Barrie went to be with his Lord and Savior.</p> <p>Beloved husband of Ellen Scheepstra.</p> <p>Loving father of: John Groen & his wife Lyla of Codrington Teresa & her husband Andy Miller of Renfrew Ron Groen & his wife Gina of Orillia Annette & her husband Greg Stewart of Orillia Carla & her husband Norman Yorke of Orillia</p> <p>Predeceased by daughter Jennifer Groen</p> <p>Dear grandfather of: Andrea, Matthew, Jessica, Tyler, Clayton, Alex, Joshua and Shana</p> <p>Loved brother of John Scheepstra & his wife Gerdie of Colborne and the late Steve & his wife Lorraine of Georgetown. Remembered by many nieces, nephews, cousins & in-laws.</p> <p>The funeral was in the Covenant CRC in Barrie. Memorial donations to the Orillia Christian School would be appreciated by the family.</p> <p>Cards sent to Simcoe Funeral Home (38 James St E, Orillia ON L3V 1L1) will be forwarded to the family.</p>	<p>Jo (JOUKJE) VANDERBOOM</p> <p>After a lengthy illness, Jo was called Home to be with her Savior and Lord on Thursday February 22, 2007, age 84.</p> <p>Jo was a dearly loved, and devoted wife to John (Sietse) for over 60 years.</p> <p>Most beloved mother of: Theo & his wife Renee of Atlanta, Georgia, Christine & Jim Vanderkooy of Ancaster, ON Margaret & Jack Vanderkooy of St. Thomas, ON</p> <p>A much loved Oma of 12 grandchildren: Teresa (Tim), Mark, David (Pam), Karen, Sheldon (Gail), Michelle (Karl), Tricia, Sarah, Steven (Jen), Tim (Lindsay), Rachel (Jon), Leisha, and great-grandmother to Leisel and Alex.</p> <p>Dear sister to Margaretha and Hessel, and Jan, all of Holland.</p> <p>A private family burial took place on Tuesday February 27, 2007 followed by a memorial service at the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church which was a celebration of Jo's life.</p> <p>Condolences can be sent to: John Vanderboom Meadowlands Retirement Home Unit 207-1248 Mohawk Rd Ancaster ON L9K 1P5</p>		<p>"Safe in the arms of Jesus"</p> <p>MARIA (Riet) KOOY (nee Bron)</p> <p>December 23, 1937 - February 22, 2007</p> <p>peacefully at Humber River Regional Hospital, Toronto at 69 years of age.</p> <p>Beloved wife of Leendert Kooy.</p> <p>Dear mother of: Bill & Marg Kooy - Will, late Lisa, Sandra (Kevin), Brandon (Kim) Rick & Monique Kooy - Daniel and Matthew Johanna Kooy & Julio Albuquerque Harry & Sharon Kooy - Bradley, Katelyn, Stacey and Jason Jackie & Paul Dykxhoom - Joel (Rachel), Joshua (Erika) and Jesse Francy & Karl VanderVeen - Maria, James, Justin, Rachel and Sarah Len & Carrie Kooy - Felicia, Andrew, Thomas, Darren and Evan Albert & Mary-Ann Kooy - Peter, Timothy, Rebecca, Daniel, Michael and Carolyn Benjamin & Joann Kooy - Alex and Jordan.</p> <p>Address: Leendert Kooy, 90 Topcliff Ave, Downsview ON M3N 1L8</p> <p>Maria Cornelia Bron was born on December 23, 1937 in Waddinxveen, Holland to her parents, Willem and Johanna Bron. Riet was the second child of four; Dicky, Albert, and Annie were her siblings. In 1958 she went on a "six month" trip with her grandfather to Canada where she was going to visit her Tante Rie and Ome Jan and cousins. On the boat, De Grote Beer, she met her future husband, Leen. The couple began courting and a year later they got married in Toronto. Maria and Leendert were blessed with nine beautiful children and they led an incredibly busy life. Much of their time was put into the music ministry of the Ontario Christian Music Assembly, of which all of their children and some of their grandchildren were a part. Maria was a tireless worker, a mom who gave and gave of herself. She was an incredible example of unselfishness and had many abilities. We were also amazed by her keen sense of humor. Riet loved people and she particularly had a heart for those who were lonely or had special needs. Even though she was so busy, she sent cards to many people when they were sick or bereaved. Since her family remained in Holland after she emigrated, visits back were a source of joy for her. For many years she would go back to Holland sometimes twice a year to visit her mom and sisters (and to get a much needed rest). Her last visit this past October was a particular joy as she felt so well and connected with an amazing amount of people in a two week visit. Riet and Leen were thankful for the cottage they built up north on Pickering River. They enjoyed the community of people and the quieter life on the river, swimming, waterskiing and fishing.</p> <p>The busy life came crashing to a halt in November of 2004 when one day before the Thomson Hall Concert, Riet had a massive heart attack followed by a stroke. Life as they knew it was over. Leen and Riet had to adjust to a much slower lifestyle and a painful adjustment it was. In the last two years they spent time doing things together. They often went to visit Tante Rie in Fort Erie. They enjoyed going to watch the grandchildren play hockey and volleyball. Riet's health slowly began failing and her breathing in the last months got more difficult. After a four week stay in the hospital, including two times on life support, Maria succumbed to her illnesses. Whenever she was asked how she was doing she always said, "I'm okay" or "I'm fine". We are thankful for the promise we have from God that Riet is now indeed fine. She is now with God and praising him with the heavenly host who are gathered around his throne. We are thankful for the blessing Riet was to us as a wife, mother, grandmother, and friend. We will miss her tremendously!</p>

Classifieds / Job Opportunities

Anniversaries

MARTIN AND LYNN BOSVELD
(nee Van Delden)

March 18, 1967, Chatham, Ontario
Their children and grandchildren give thanks to God for Mom and Dad (Oma and Opa), and rejoice as they celebrate **40 years of marriage!**
We praise God for their faithful witness and give thanks for their good health.

Pauline & Khanh Ho, Mississauga
Talia, Rianna, Jaden, and Kayla
Ed & Joanne Bosveld, Chatham
Joshua, Kristen, Angelo, and Caleb
Ray & Lisa Bosveld, St. Thomas
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Chatham Ontario N7L 5L6
mbosveld@ciaccess.com

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Christopher to Julie Honig
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Redeemer Lutheran Church, Samia)
and

Jeremy to Angela McHugh
(wedding: Sun. Oct. 28, 2007,
Mountainview CRC, Grimsby)

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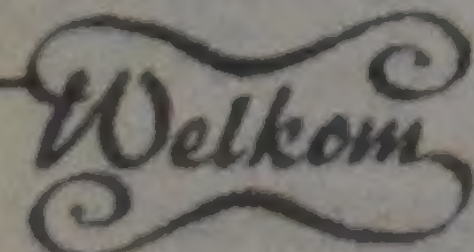
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Immanuel Christian Elementary School Immanuel Christian High School
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h_akerkhof@sympatico.ca

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2191 Benjamin Ave
Ottawa Ontario K2A 1P6
Tel: (613) 722-5836 Fax: (613) 722-0665
Email: paul@ocschool.org
Website: www.ocschool.org

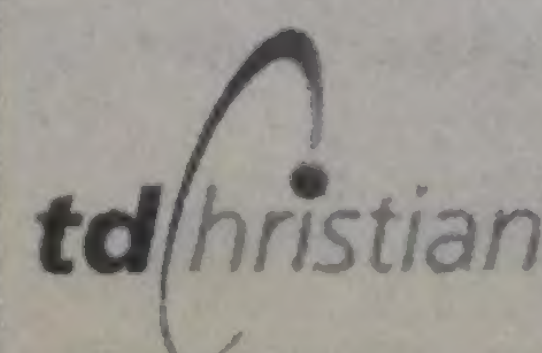
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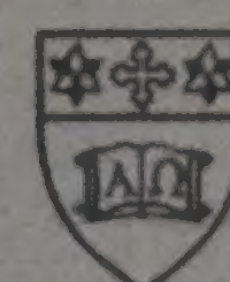
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Direct general inquiries and applications to:

Dr. Jacob P. Ellens, Vice-President (Academic)
Redeemer University College
777 Garner Road East
Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4 Canada
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All who call on God in true faith, earnestly from the heart, will certainly be heard, and will receive what they have asked and desired, although not in the hour or in the measure, or the very thing which they ask; yet they will obtain something greater and more glorious than they had dared to ask.

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mar 18 - Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Klomps will be preaching.

Mar 30 Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep - "Ik Voel Nattingheid" Christian Heritage School, **Jordan Station, Ont.** See ad Feb 5 issue for details or call 519-283-6285.

Apr 7 The Liberation Choir Fundraising Dinner will take place at 5:30 - 7 pm in Studio Theatre/Convention Centre at Hamilton Place with Micheal Coren as guest speaker. Included in this ticket price of \$ 200 is: prime seating at the concert and a Dinner Reservation. A \$ 100 tax receipt will be issued by Worldwide Christian Schools. Tickets available at Pianohouse Burlington, Worldwide Christian Schools, or Tjitske @ 905 520 0207

Apr 7 The Liberation Choir Burlington/Brampton Chapters perform in the EASTER CONCERT with Guelph Symphony Orchestra (Simon Irving, conductor) and a Combined Children's Choir (Elizabeth Webster, conductor) and Jennifer McMahon, soprano soloist. Director: Willem Van Suijdam @ 7.30 pm, GREAT HALL, HAMILTON PLACE, HAMILTON ON. Ticket prices: \$40 \$33 \$25. Tickets available at: Hamilton Place Box office, Ticket master, Choir members, River Run Centre in Guelph, Selected Dutch Stores and at the Pianohouse Burlington, 5205 Harvester Road, Burlington. www.liberationchoir.com

Apr 14 Festival of Praise with the Ontario Christian Male Choruses. 7:30 p.m. Covenant CRC, St. Catharines. See ad this issue for details

Apr 27, 28 Cambridge Christian School 40th anniversary. Call Nick at 519-620-8650 or web-site www.cambridgechristianschool.com See ad this issue for more details.

May 26 Laurentian Hills Christian School 40th anniversary, 11 Laurentian Dr, **Kitchener, ON** Dinner, program, \$15/person. To reserve by May 1st, call Mrs Grift 519-576-6700 or Mrs. Olthoff 519-742-5152. Check the web site for more details at www.lhcs.ws

June 9, 10 The First Christian Reformed Church of Kemptville 50 year celebration. Banquet on June 9 and worship service on June 10. Contact Harmen Boersma (613-258-5565).

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Check the web site for more details at www.lhcs.ws

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April 28 - 7:00pm - Celebration/Thanksgiving evening (at Forward Baptist Church)

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News

Coal in cars: great fuel or climate foe?

Mark Clayton

Coal companies want to fuel your car and lately, they're getting political support for the idea.

Turning coal into gasoline-like fuel has several advantages. It would use North America's vast coal reserves. It would reduce the need for foreign oil and help dampen spikes in energy prices. There's just one problem: It is not "climate friendly" – at least, not yet.

Coal-to-liquids (CTL) fuels could end up emitting nearly double the carbon dioxide that the equivalent amount of gasoline does, mostly because of the way it's manufactured. The CTL industry says new technology will fix the problem. But because such technology is not yet developed, it's unclear whether CTL fuels would be competitive without state and federal subsidies, even competing against high-priced diesel, jet fuel, or gasoline, analysts say.

That's where politicians come in. In the U.S. the National Mining Association has ramped up lobbying, creating a new coalition and website, futurecoalfuels.org. Many in Washington are warming to the idea. CTL bills in the House of Representatives and the Senate have received strong backing.

"We have a very good chance of getting legislation passed in this Congress because momentum continues to grow," says Corey Henry, a spokesman for the Coal-to-Liquids Coalition, which includes coal producers and CTL developers. "It's one energy solution that does enjoy broad bipartisan support."

Supporters of the bill range from Sen. Barack Obama (D) of Illinois to President Bush. In his State of the Union speech Jan. 23, Mr. Bush called for the United States to

produce 35 billion gallons of "alternative fuel" by 2017. The nation doesn't grow enough corn to meet even half that total.

Global-warming impact

In coal-rich Illinois, Senator Obama's support is more nuanced. Citing energy-security concerns, his bipartisan legislation would grant tax and other subsidies for development of CTL refineries.

That stance is likely to put him at odds with many environmentalists, who argue that a move to CTL will worsen global warming. Manufacturing and burning a gallon of CTL fuel creates nearly double the greenhouse-gas emissions that a gallon of gasoline does, they say.

"We want more energy security, too, but we're fighting this coal-to-liquids concept because it's just so bad for global warming," says Elizabeth Martin-Perera, a climate policy analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). "It takes us from the frying pan into the fire."

Plans for US plants

At least nine coal-to-liquids facilities are now in the planning stages, including one each in Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming that already have significant funding lined up and are slated to begin production by 2009, according to the National Energy Technology Laboratory.

If all nine plants were built, they could produce about 3 billion gallons of fuel a year – not enough to meet Bush's goal. But if federal tax incentives and state subsidies kick-start the industry, coal-based fuel production could soar to 40 billion gallons a year by 2025 – or about 10 percent of forecast oil demand that year, the National Coal Council reported to the Department of Energy (DOE) last year.

A key question is whether those plants will capture the greenhouse gases they produce and bury them underground. If they don't, the plants will pump millions of tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere annually, environmentalists say. Even if gases were pumped underground, CTL fuel, when burned in an engine, would still send about 8 percent more CO₂ skyward than a gallon of gasoline, a landmark 2003 Princeton University study found.

But CTL supporters say the industry would produce "clean fuel" that helps the environment by putting out fewer smog-forming nitrous oxides and other chemicals than regular diesel fuel. If 85 percent of CO₂ from coal-to-liquid refineries could be captured and stored, CTL diesel fuel would then have about the same emissions as a gallon of regular diesel.

"By the time this first fleet of CTL plants is constructed, that technology will be there and we'll be using it," Mr. Henry says.

However, critics say few companies are planning for such technology.

News briefs

Canada - disgraceful!

A recent report informing us that Canadians lag far behind their peers in the developed world in terms of cell phone use had the media in a tizzy early in March. Only 56 per cent of Canadians have a cell phone, compared with an average of about 90 per cent in the rest of the developed world.

"Canadian wireless adoption is a national disgrace," wailed the Seaboard Group, a telecommunications consultant. It warned that the discrepancy leaves the country at a competitive disadvantage.

Yes, I'm sure all those kids and adults that we see everywhere with a cell phone glued to their ear are adding immeasurably to Canada's Gross Domestic Product.

We're even behind Turkey in our adoption of cell phones. How backward can you be!

But on average Canadians pay one-third more for cell phone usage than people in the U.S. That is the reason Canadians are so backward and unproductive, say the experts. Most Canadians still use cell phones only for emergencies.

So keeping your phone bill down is now considered being backward??

Anoraks and the Canadian identity

Former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, in a speech that speculates extravagantly about the existence of a global collective mind in which all our individual minds participate, suggests that it is winter that serves as the melting pot that makes all Canadians equal. Although every ethnic group brings its own color and style of dress, she says, in our long winters they are covered by "a dark blue anorak and overshoes."

Whaaa? What neighborhood does she live in? Does she get out at all in winter? Most Canadians would be more familiar with a Hawaiian mu-mu than an anorak. And every Canadian schoolboy made to wear overshoes by an overly protective mother promptly lost them. It was a sure way to incite the archetypal bully because he knew you couldn't possibly outrun him.

To this day, the only Canadians who wear overshoes are bankers, bureaucrats and Governor Generals' husbands.

"Once we have accepted anoraks and overshoes, we are equalized," intones Madame Clarkson. An anorak, for those who don't recognize the word, is another name for parka, the word familiar to most Canadians. Wikipedia informs us that the word comes from the Inuit – of Greenland. In Britain it is slang for nerd.

Although I don't think the former Governor General was suggesting we become a nation of nerds, I'd hate to think our Canadian identity was tied to dark blue parkas and ... overshoes!

Tundra invasion

There's a threat to Canada's far north. No, it's not the Danes seizing another island or the Americans sneaking through the northwest passage without a ticket. It's an army of trees marching out across the tundra. Fueled by global warming, they are advancing northward "at an alarming rate" say the scientists.

They warn that the change also has global impact because trees and shrubs absorb sunlight at a greater rate than tundra. "The absorbed light is then re-emitted as heat, which adds to atmospheric warming and allows even more trees to grow."

And I was planting trees to help absorb CO₂ to fight global warming. Up north they do the opposite?

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